

## NEGATIVE DECLARATION

Pursuant to: Division 13, Public Resources Code

### Description

The proposed project would improve the Interstate 5/State Route 126 (I-5/SR-126) interchange, located in the City of Santa Clarita. In the area of the project, I-5 is an eight-lane freeway separated by an unpaved median, while SR-126 is a two-lane highway separated by an unpaved median. Land uses within and surrounding the project area include commercial, industrial and open space. ~~In the area of the project, I-5 is an 8 lane freeway separated by an unpaved median, while SR-126 is a 2-lane highway separated by an unpaved median. Land uses within and surrounding the project area include commercial, industrial and open space.~~ Proposed improvements to the interchange would include the construction of new ramps, reconstruction of existing ramps, replacement of the I-5/SR-126 separation, widening of The Old Road undercrossing, and widening of SR-126.

### Determination

An Initial Study (IS) has been prepared for the California Department of Transportation. On the basis of this study, it is determined that the proposed action will not have a significant effect upon the environment for the following reasons:

1. The project will not have significant noise, air quality, or water quality impacts, and will not change the rate of use of any natural resources.
2. The project will not result in a significant amount of siltation by wind and/or water after Best Management Practices and erosion control measures are implemented.
3. The project will not significantly affect fish, plant life, or wildlife after mitigation; it will not significantly affect any rare, threatened, or endangered species, including the unarmored threespine stickleback (*Gasterosteus aculeatus williamsoni*), least Bell's vireo (*Vireo bellii pusillus*), or southwestern willow flycatcher (*Empidonax traillii extimus*). ~~significantly affect any rare, threatened, or endangered species, including the unarmored threespine stickleback (*Gasterosteus aculeatus williamsoni*), least Bell's vireo (*Vireo bellii pusillus*), or southwestern willow flycatcher (*Empidonax traillii extimus*).~~
4. No historic or archaeological sites or structures of architectural or engineering significance will be affected.
5. The project will not significantly affect public services, employment, industry, or the economy of the area.
6. The project will not affect any important farmland, floodplains, or scenic resources within the project area.
7. The project will not adversely affect present patterns of traffic circulation.

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Mr. Ronald Kosinski  
Chief, Environmental Planning Branch  
California Department of Transportation  
District 7

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Date

SCH: 2000111165  
07-LA-126 KP R8.3-R9.7  
07-LA-5 KP R88.0-R90.4  
EA: 187210  
May 2001

## **I-5/SR-126 Interchange Project**

### **INITIAL STUDY/ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT**

STATE OF CALIFORNIA  
Department of Transportation

and

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION  
Federal Highway Administration

Pursuant to:  
42 U.S.C. 4332(2)(c)

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Ron Kosinski  
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# Acronyms

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ACOE	Army Corps of Engineers
ADT	average daily traffic
APE	Area of Potential Effects
ARB	Air Resources Board
BMPs	Best Management Practices
CAAAAs	Clean Air Act Amendments
Caltrans	California Department of Transportation
CDFG	California Department of Fish and Game
CEQA	California Environmental Quality Act
CFR	<i>Code of Federal Regulations</i>
cfs	cubic feet per second
cm	centimeters
cms	cubic meters per second
CO	carbon monoxide
° F	degrees Fahrenheit
DOT	Department of Transportation
DTSC	Department of Toxic Substances Control
EIR	Environmental Impact Report
EIR/EA	Environmental Impact Report/Environmental Assessment
EIS/EIR	Environmental Impact Statement/Environmental Impact Report
EPA	Environmental Protection Agency
ESA	Endangered Species Act
FEMA	Federal Emergency Management Agency
FHWA	Federal Highway Administration
FONSI	Finding of No Significant Impact
FPPA	Farmland Protection Policy Act

FTA	Federal Transit Act
HOV	high-occupancy vehicle
HPSR	Historic Property Survey Report
I-5	Interstate 5
ICU	intersection capacity utilization
IS	Initial Study
ISA	Initial Site Assessment
IS/EA	Initial Study/Environmental Assessment
km	kilometers
KP	kilopost
LACDPW	Los Angeles County Department of Public Works
LACMTA	Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority
LESA	Land Evaluation and Site Assessment
LOS	level of service
m	meters
m <sup>2</sup>	square meters
µg/m <sup>3</sup>	micrograms per cubic meter
NAAQS	National Ambient Air Quality Standards
NEPA	National Environmental Policy Act
NHS	National Highway System
NO <sub>x</sub>	oxides of nitrogen
NRHP	National Register of Historic Places
NPDES	National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System
PDT	Project Development Team
PEER	Preliminary Environmental Evaluation Report
PM	post mile
PM <sub>10</sub>	respirable particulate matter
ppm	parts per million
PSR	Project Study Report
RCPG	Regional Comprehensive Plan and Guide

ROC	reactive organic compounds
RTIP	Regional Transportation Improvement Program
RTP	Regional Transportation Plan
RWQCB	Regional Water Quality Control Board
SCAB	South Coast Air Basin
SCAG	Southern California Association of Governments
SCAQMD	South Coast Air Quality Management District
SEA	Significant Ecological Area
SHELL	State Highway Extra Legal Load
SHPO	State Historic Preservation Officer
SI	Site Investigation
SR	State Route
SSP	Standard Special Provisions
STIP	State Transportation Improvement Program
SWPPP	Stormwater Pollution Prevention Plan
TASAS	Traffic Accident Surveillance and Analysis Systems
U.S.	United States
U.S.C.	United States Code
UST	underground storage tank
V/C	volume to capacity

# 1 Purpose and Need

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## 1.1 Purpose of the Proposed Project

The proposed project would reconstruct and reconfigure the existing Interstate 5 (I-5)/State Route (SR) 126 interchange located northwest of the City of Santa Clarita in Los Angeles County (Figures 1A and 1B). The project is intended to achieve the following objectives:

- Improve traffic operations
- Provide missing interchange directional movements
- Increase capacity of the interchange and improve local access and circulation
- Incorporate planned infrastructure improvements
- Enhance safety
- Accommodate planned growth within the study area

Specifically, the project would improve the level of service (LOS), provide a full-access interchange, reduce travel time, improve system linkage for regional truck transport, and meet the economic demand for access to Valencia Commerce Center.

## 1.2 Need for the Project

This section documents the need for the proposed improvements to the I-5/SR-126 interchange. The discussion below focuses on deficiencies in the existing interchange, constraints in capacity of the interchange, and accident rates.

### ~~1.1.1~~ 1.2.1 Operational Deficiencies

I-5 is a major north/south freeway connecting the states of California, Oregon, and Washington. It is part of the Interstate System of Highways and is used as a major local and regional truck route. I-5 is included in the National Highway System (NHS) and is listed on the State Highway Extra Legal Load (SHELL) Route System. These systems list those highways that have been constructed to accommodate the high volume and weight of inter- and intra-state truck traffic.

SR-126 extends westward from the I-5 interchange in Los Angeles County to United States (U.S.) 101 in Ventura County and is included in the State Freeway and Expressway System. The route is heavily used between I-5 and the Ventura coast. The westernmost end of SR-126, in Ventura County (from Route 150 to U.S. 101), is constructed to freeway standards, but the remainder of the route (from Route 150 east to I-5) consists of a four-lane expressway in semirural terrain. From the SR-126 interchange to the Magic Mountain Parkway interchange, SR-126 and I-5 are contiguous. From the I-5/Magic Mountain

Parkway interchange, SR-126 continues eastward along Magic Mountain Parkway to San Fernando Road to its terminus at SR-14.

## Insert

*Figure 1A Vicinity Map*

## Insert

*Figure 1B Location Map*

Currently, there are no direct connectors from southbound I-5 to eastbound SR-126 or westbound SR-126 to southbound I-5; and commuters must utilize Rye Canyon Road via The Old Road hook ramps. The interchange does not meet current Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) guidelines, which recommend that interchanges provide all movements. The general public would benefit from the savings in commute time and increased safety that these improvements would bring.

### 1.2.2 Capacity Constraints

Existing (1997) average daily traffic (ADT) volumes for the I-5 corridor and adjacent arterials are shown in Figure 2. Existing peak-hour volumes at the I-5/SR-126 interchange and along SR-126 are detailed in Figure 3. These data show that the existing traffic volumes and turning movements are accommodated to an acceptable level.

The existing I-5/SR-126 interchange is a partial interchange, with the southbound-to-eastbound and westbound-to-southbound movements accommodated at The Old Road southbound hook-ramps. These ramps are accessed via Rye Canyon Road. As development east of I-5 occurs, traffic volumes on these facilities would increase, resulting in congestion, delay, and out-of-direction travel.

Build-out of the Valencia Commerce Center and other area development is scheduled to occur by the year 2020, which would significantly increase the traffic volumes within the study area. The year 2020 forecasted traffic volumes were developed from the Santa Clarita Valley Consolidated Traffic Model, which is a local traffic forecasting model prepared jointly by the County of Los Angeles and the City of Santa Clarita. The model has taken into account the development of Valencia Commerce Center; projected additional traffic generated by the Magic Mountain theme park and resort; projected growth within Valencia Town Center; and the proposed Newhall Ranch residential, commercial, and business park development. These developments have already been cleared environmentally and are either in the planning or design phase. The projections are also based on the expected rate of population growth within the area. For a more detailed discussion on the status of other local projects, refer to Section 2.3.

Forecasts for the 2020 No-Build Alternative (Figure 4) indicate that the traffic volume on southbound Commerce Center Drive would increase to 3,500 vehicles with the extension across Castaic Creek to SR-126. The volume on eastbound SR-126 would increase from 1,500 vehicles to 4,300 vehicles; and on westbound Newhall Ranch Road, the volume would increase from 500 vehicles to 3,000 vehicles. In general, the volume on the roadway network within the study area would more than triple over the next 20 years. Table 1 provides a comparison of the existing and 2020 forecasted No-Build morning (A.M.) and afternoon (P.M.) peak-hour traffic volumes for selected locations.

## Insert

*Figure 2 Existing ADT Volumes*

**Insert**

*Figure 3 Existing Peak Hour Traffic Volumes*

## Insert

*Figure 4 2020 Peak Hour Volumes -- No-Build Alternative*

**TABLE 1**  
Comparison of Peak-Hour Traffic Volumes

Interchanges	A.M. Peak Hours			P.M. Peak Hours		
	Existing	No-Build (2020)	Percent Change	Existing	No-Build (2020)	Percent Change
Southbound Commerce Center Drive to Eastbound SR-126*	*	200	--	*	1,400	--
Westbound SR-126 to Northbound Commerce Center Drive*	*	1,400	--	*	500	--
Westbound Avenue Stanford/ Newhall Ranch Road to Westbound SR-126	40	1,700	4,150	160	1,900	1,088
Eastbound SR-126 to Eastbound Avenue Stanford/ Newhall Ranch Road	200	2,200	1,000	60	2,700	4,400
Northbound I-5 to Westbound SR-126	420	1,400	233	430	1,400	226
Southbound I-5 to Westbound SR-126	10	1,400	13,900	190	1,300	584
Eastbound SR-126 to Northbound I-5	70	700	900	90	700	678
Eastbound SR-126 to Southbound I-5	550	1,600	191	450	1,600	256
Northbound I-5 to Eastbound Avenue Stanford/Newhall Ranch Road	350	300	-14	40	100	150

\*The existing Commerce Center Drive terminates at Franklin Avenue; access between SR-126 and Commerce Center Drive is provided via Wolcott Way.

An intersection capacity analysis was conducted for the I-5/SR-126 interchange (Austin-Foust, 1998). The volume to capacity (V/C) ratios for the 2020 no-project condition range between 1.42 and 1.79 (LOS F), as compared to existing V/C ratios of between 0.39 and 0.45 (Table 2). (Refer to Table 3 for descriptions of the various LOS and V/C ratios.) These V/C ratios demonstrate that the existing I-5/SR-126 interchange cannot accommodate the forecasted growth in traffic.

**TABLE 2**  
Intersection Capacity Analysis

Location	Existing Conditions				2020 No Project Condition			
	A.M. Traffic		P.M. Traffic		A.M. Traffic		P.M. Traffic	
	V/C	LOS	V/C	LOS	V/C	LOS	V/C	LOS
I-5 NB Ramps & SR-126	0.45	A	0.39	A	1.42	F	1.79	F
The Old Road & Henry Mayo Drive	0.36	A	0.31	A	NA	NA	NA	NA
I-5 SB Ramps & SR-126	0.40	A	0.40	A	1.20	F	1.24	F

Source: Austin-Foust Associates, Inc. December 1998.

**TABLE 3**  
Levels of Service

LOS	Volume/Capacity (V/C) Ratio	Maximum Density (Cars/Mile/Lane)	Description
A	0.00 to 0.60	10	Free-flow operation. The ability to maneuver is almost completely unimpeded.
B	0.61 to 0.70	16	Reasonable free-flow operation. The ability to maneuver is only slightly restricted.
C	0.71 to 0.80	24	Near free-flow operation. The freedom to maneuver is noticeably restricted.
D	0.81 to 0.90	32	Speeds begin to decline. The freedom to maneuver is more noticeably limited.
E	0.91 to 1.00	39.3	Operation is at capacity. There is very limited room to maneuver.
F	Above 1.00	---	Breakdown in vehicular flow.

### 1.2.3 Accident Analysis

The actual accident rates for the most recent 3-year period were compared to the statewide average (expected) accident rates for similar facility types. The most recently available 3-year period extends from April 1, 1997 to March 31, 2000. These rates are taken from the Traffic Accident Surveillance and Analysis Systems (TASAS) data and are summarized in Table 4a.

As shown in Table 4a, the actual rates of fatalities, injuries and fatalities and total accidents along I-5 and the on- and off-ramps are below the statewide average for a similar type facility. Review of the data for the I-5 mainline shows that the forty-one accidents, twenty-three southbound and eighteen northbound, that did occur over the three-year

period were mostly due to speeding during the daylight on a clear, dry day. For the ramps, review of the data over the 3-year period shows that a total of 2 accidents occurred for each of the following ramps: northbound off-ramp, southbound on-ramp and the northbound on-ramp. No accidents occurred on the southbound off-ramp over the 3-year period.

Examination of the data in Table 4b for SR-126 shows that the actual rates of fatalities, injuries and fatalities and total accidents are below what is expected for a similar type facility. Over the 20-month study period (February 1, 1999 to September 30, 2000) there were 6 reported accidents, 1 in the eastbound direction and 5 in the westbound direction. The majority of the accidents were due to improper turning.

As the volumes within the roadway network increase over time, there is a statistical probability that the total number of accidents may increase, but the proposed improvements are expected to increase capacity and improve operation, thereby reducing the potential for accidents as compared to the no-build condition.

**TABLE 4A**  
Actual and Average Accident Rates for I-5 and the I-5/SR-126 Ramps  
per million vehicle miles\*  
(per million vehicle kilometers [km])

Route Segment	Actual			Average		
	Total	Fatalities	Injuries & Fatalities	Total	Fatalities	Injuries & Fatalities
I-5 from north of Rye Canyon Road to Honor Rancho Drive overcrossing (970 meters [m] north of I-5/SR-126 interchange)	0.290 (0.180)	0 (0)	0.090 (0.056)	0.700 (0.435)	0.003 (0.002)	0.220 (0.137)
I-5 ramps at SR-126 interchange:						
Northbound off-ramp	0.200 (0.124)	0 (0)	0 (0)	1.500 (0.932)	.005 (0.003)	0.610 (0.379)
Southbound on-ramp	0.220 (0.137)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0.400 (0.249)	0.004 (0.002)	0.130 (0.081)
Northbound on-ramp	0.730 (0.454)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0.900 (0.559)	0.003 (0.002)	0.260 (0.162)
Southbound off-ramp	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0.450 (0.280)	0.004 (0.002)	0.150 (0.093)

\* Fatality rates are per 100 million vehicle miles.  
Source: TASAS Table "B" dated January 8, 2001.

**TABLE 4B**

Actual and Average Accident Rates for SR-126  
per million vehicle miles\*  
(per million vehicle km)

Route Segment	Actual			Average		
	Total	Fatalities	Injuries & Fatalities	Total	Fatalities	Injuries & Fatalities
SR-126 from Wolcott Way (800 m west of Castaic Creek Bridge) to the I-5 interchange	0.520 (0.323)	0 (0)	0.090 (0.056)	0.650 (0.404)	0.022 (0.014)	0.290 (0.180)

\* Fatality rates are per 100 million vehicle miles.  
Source: TASAS Table "B" dated May 14, 2001.

## 1.3 Project Status

### 1.3.1 History of the Planning Process

The I-5/SR-126 Interchange Project was initiated with a Project Study Report (PSR). The PSR is a project initiation document that is required for all major projects prior to their being included in a state or local programming document such as the State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP). The outcome of the project initiation process is a project scope tied to a reliable cost estimate and schedule suitable for programming or local commitment and for proceeding to the environmental evaluation and project alternative selection phase. The PSR documents agree on the design concept, design scope, schedule, and estimated cost of the project so that the project can be included in a future programming document.

The PSR for this project was approved on May 5, 1999. A Preliminary Environmental Evaluation Report (PEER) and hazardous waste Initial Site Assessment were prepared concurrently with the PSR to identify the environmental issues and anticipated environmental impacts of the proposed project. The PEER was completed in February 1999 to meet Caltrans and California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) requirements. An Environmental Significance Checklist was prepared as part of the PEER and is included in this Initial Study/Environmental Assessment (IS/EA) in Section 4.

### 1.3.2 Other Relevant Documents

There are several planned and ongoing projects within the vicinity of the proposed project. These projects, described in Section 2.3, have separate environmental documents that evaluate their environmental impacts affecting the same general area as this proposed project. These studies were reviewed, and relevant information has been incorporated into this document. All relevant documents have been listed in the reference list in Section 8.

## 1.4 Required Coordination and Applicable Regulatory Requirements

Caltrans is the state Lead Agency for this IS/EA under CEQA; FHWA is the federal Lead Agency. In addition to direction provided by Caltrans and FHWA, ongoing project coordination has been provided through a Project Development Team (PDT). The PDT is composed of technical staff drawn from Caltrans, FHWA, Los Angeles County, Valencia Company, City of Santa Clarita, and the CH2M HILL consultant team. The PDT continues to meet monthly throughout the course of the study to review progress of the study, to exchange technical information, and to respond to new issues affecting the project.

Consultation and coordination with a variety of other agencies have also been required. Among these are:

- Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)
- Regional Water Quality Control Board
- Native American Heritage Commissioner
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
- California Department of Fish and Game
- Southern California Association of Governments (SCAG)
- South Coast Air Quality Management District (SCAQMD)
- County of Los Angeles Planning Department
- City of Santa Clarita Planning Department

Construction of the proposed project will require [the following permits and associated coordination:](#)

- State Water Resources Control Board Clean Water Act Section 401 Water Quality Certification

## 2 Description of Proposed Project

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### 2.1 Project Description

The proposed project is located in Los Angeles County, California, northwest of the City of Santa Clarita. The project is between kilopost (KP) R6.8 and R9.7 (post mile [PM] R4.2 to R6.0) on SR-126, and between KP R88.0 and R90.4 (PM R54.7 to R56.2) on I-5 (Figure 1B). The interchange is located approximately 16 km (9.9 miles) north of the I-5/SR-14 interchange.

Four alternatives were studied in the PSR (Valencia Company, 1999b), including a no-build alternative and three build alternatives. Each of these alternatives included designs for the I-5/SR-126 interchange, as well as alternatives for constructing an interchange at the SR-126/Commerce Center Drive intersection, located 1.5 km (0.9 mile) to the west. Since that document was prepared, the decision was made to split the interchange improvements into two separate projects because each has distinct logical termini and has independent utility from the other. Of the four alternatives described in the PSR, two alternative configurations, Alternatives A and C, for the I-5/SR-126 interchange are presented. The proposed I-5/SR-126 configuration for Alternative B is identical to that of Alternative C; as a result, Alternative B is not discussed further in this document.

The estimated cost of this project is \$22.5 million for Alternative C, the preferred alternative, and is expected to be funded jointly by Valencia Company and federal funding programs administered through Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority (LACMTA) or the State of California. For the fiscal year 2001-2002, \$7.5 million in funding would come from LACMTA and \$5.513 million from STIP funds. According to the 1998 STIP, \$5.513 million will be provided through the 1998 Interregional Transportation Improvement Program (ITIP) and \$7.509 million will be provided through the 1998 Regional Transportation Improvement Program (RTIP). The remainder of the project will be funded by the Valencia Company.

### 2.2 Relationship to State, Regional, and Local Transportation Planning

The proposed project is listed in the Regional Transportation Improvement Program (RTIP) for 2000/01 – 2005/06, as approved on October 6, 2000. As such, the project is consistent with the 1998 Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) prepared by SCAG.

### 2.3 Other Local Projects and Proposals

SR-126 is currently used as a major route between I-5 and Ventura County to the west. During the next 20 years, the area around the I-5/SR-126 interchange is projected to experience a build-out of major commercial and industrial developments, which would

result in significant increases in regional and inter-regional traffic on these routes. Increases in local traffic are also projected for the area due to ongoing construction and planned development within the Santa Clarita Valley. Additionally, several transportation improvement projects within the Santa Clarita Valley would change traffic patterns, contributing additional traffic to the I-5/SR-126 interchange. These commercial/industrial developments and local transportation improvement projects are discussed below.

1. **Valencia Commerce Center Expansion.** Valencia Company is developing 284 hectares (702 acres) northwest of the I-5/SR-126 interchange as a major industrial, office, and supporting commercial-use center. Approximately 40 percent (113 hectares [280 acres]) of the area is being preserved as open space and hillside management area. Despite this preservation of open space, Valencia Commerce Center is forecast to grow from the existing 200,000 square meters (49 acres) to approximately 1.2 million square meters (296 acres) by the year 2020, resulting in a large employment center north of SR-126 at Commerce Center Drive. The build-out of Valencia Commerce Center would add approximately 110,000 vehicle trips per day (Austin-Foust, 1998). A majority of drivers making these trips would utilize SR-126, with a high proportion of those trips accessing I-5 through the I-5/SR-126 interchange.

An Environmental Impact Report (EIR) (Sikand, 1990) was finalized in April 1990. It stated that the purpose of the proposed project is to develop a major expansion of the existing Valencia Industrial Center, serving the growing business needs of the Santa Clarita Valley and surrounding communities. The proposed project would result in significant adverse impacts to the following environmental resource areas: geotechnical resources, floodplain, cultural resources, biota, scenic resources, noise levels, air quality, sewage disposal, water service, traffic, fire service, sheriff service, environmental safety, and noise levels. With the implementation of mitigation measures discussed in the final EIR, these effects would be mitigated to levels of insignificance, except for unavoidable significant impacts to air quality. Because air quality impacts could not be mitigated to levels of insignificance, a Statement of Overriding Consideration was prepared (Sikand, 1991). The development of Valencia Commerce Center was cleared environmentally and amended to the Local Plan in September 1991. A tentative parcel map for the area has also been approved.

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2. **Commerce Center Drive Extension and Bridge over Castaic Creek.** As part of the development plans for Valencia Commerce Center, Valencia Company plans to improve the traffic circulation within the area. The area currently has access from I-5 at Hasley Canyon Road, located north of SR-126. Planned access improvements, already under construction and partially completed, would result in an extension of Commerce Center Drive southward from its previous terminus near Franklin Avenue, across a new bridge over Castaic Creek, to form a signalized intersection with SR-126. These projects, near the Castaic Creek, were included in an approved final EIR (Sikand, 1990), discussed above.
3. **Newhall Ranch Road Connection.** Newhall Ranch Road would be constructed from east of the northbound I-5 off-ramp as an ultimate six- to eight-lane (three to four lanes in each direction) city arterial, connecting to McBean Parkway. This connection to I-5/SR-126 would provide access to the Newhall Ranch development, a master-planned community located west of I-5, consisting of over 20,000 residential units and over 464,000 square meters (115 acres) designated for commercial and industrial use. This project was included in an amendment to the City of Santa Clarita Circulation Element, and was evaluated in a PEER (Valencia Company, 1998). The PEER determined that there were no significant environmental impacts, and a Categorical Exemption/ Categorical Exclusion was filed~~and was evaluated in a PEER (Valencia Company, 1998). The PEER determined that there were no significant environmental impacts, and a Categorical Exemption/ Categorical Exclusion was filed.~~
4. **I-5/Hasley Canyon Road Interchange Project.** Proposed development within Valencia Commerce Center would generate additional traffic accessing I-5 at the I-5/Hasley Canyon Road interchange, located 1.6 km (0.99 mile) north of the I-5/SR-126 interchange. The anticipated traffic increase would warrant improvements to the interchange to reduce delay and to improve safety and traffic circulation. Improvements would include realignment and reconstruction of the existing ramps and intersection approach widening.

An IS/EA (Valencia Company, 2000d) was released for public review in January 2001. The purpose of the proposed project is to:

- Increase capacity and improve local access and circulation
- Improve the operation of the interchange
- Incorporate planned infrastructure improvements
- Enhance safety; an

- a) Accommodate planned growth within the study area

The proposed project would result in adverse impacts to the following environmental resource areas: water quality (i.e., siltation); floodplains; wetlands; air quality; noise levels; light and glare; biological resources; and the transportation system. After mitigation, these impacts would be reduced to a level of insignificance. A Draft IS/EA (Valencia Company, 2000d) was released for public review in January 2001. The purpose of the proposed project is to:

- a) ~~increase capacity and improve local access and circulation;~~

- b)improve the operation of the interchange;
- e)incorporate planned infrastructure improvements;
- d)enhance safety; and
- e)accommodate planned growth within the study area.

The proposed project would result in adverse impacts to the following environmental resource areas: water quality (i.e., siltation); floodplains; wetlands; air quality; noise levels; light and glare; biological resources; and the transportation system. After mitigation, these impacts would be reduced to a level of insignificance.

5. **I-5/Magic Mountain Parkway Interchange Project.** Valencia Company, in cooperation with City of Santa Clarita, County of Los Angeles, and Caltrans, is developing improvement alternatives for the I-5/Magic Mountain Parkway interchange and for Magic Mountain Parkway from I-5 to McBean Parkway. The project would modify the I-5/Magic Mountain Parkway interchange, reconstruct the Santa Clara River Bridge, realign The Old Road, and realign and widen Magic Mountain Parkway from six to eight lanes.

An IS/EA (Tetra Tech, 2000) was finalized in July 2000, resulting in the approval of a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) and Negative Declaration. The purpose of the proposed project is to:

- Improve traffic safety and the deficiencies of the existing roadway
- Increase the capacity and improve the operation of existing roadways
- Alleviate existing and future congestion
- Conform to state, regional, and local plans and policies
- Facilitate the flow of goods and services through the area
- Ensure continued mobility of the public at the state, regional, and local level

The proposed project would result in adverse impacts to the following environmental resource areas: (1) topography, geology, and soils; (2) use of nonrenewable resources; (3) hazardous materials; (4) hydrology, drainage, and water quality; (4) air quality; (5) noise levels; (6) light and glare; (7) biological resources; (8) land use; (9) traffic and transportation; and (10) and construction-related impacts. There would be no significant impacts resulting from the project; however, mitigation measures have been recommended for some environmental resources to ensure that no significant impacts would occur.  
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- a)improve traffic safety and the deficiencies of the existing roadway;
- b)increase the capacity and improve the operation of existing roadways;
- c)alleviate existing and future congestion;
- d)conform to state, regional, and local plans and policies;
- e)facilitate the flow of goods and services through the area; and
- f)ensure continued mobility of the public at the state, regional, and local level.

The proposed project would result in adverse impacts to the following environmental resource areas: (1) topography, geology, and soils; (2) use of nonrenewable resources; (3) hazardous materials; (4) hydrology, drainage, and water quality; (4) air quality;

~~(5) noise levels; (6) light and glare; (7) biological resources; (8) land use; (9) traffic and transportation; (10) and construction-related impacts. There would be no significant impacts resulting from the project; however, mitigation measures have been recommended for some environmental resources to ensure that no significant impacts would occur.~~

6. **I-5/Rye Canyon Road Ramp Improvement Project.** Valencia Company is preparing a feasibility study to relocate the I-5/Rye Canyon Road hook ramps approximately 137 m (449 feet) to the north of their existing location, 1.6 km (0.99 mile) south of the I-5/SR-126 interchange. This improvement would include the installation of both a traffic signal and ramp and intersection approach widening, which would alleviate existing traffic congestion and accommodate traffic diverted during the construction of the I-5/SR-126 and I-5/Magic Mountain Parkway interchange improvements. ~~This project is still in the planning stages, and a PEER is scheduled to be completed by spring 2001. A Categorical Exemption/Categorical Exclusion is being sought.~~  
~~This project is still in the planning stages and a PEER is scheduled to be completed by spring 2001. A Categorical Exemption/Categorical Exclusion is being sought.~~
7. **I-5/Valencia Boulevard Interchange Improvements.** The proposed project would consist of widening Valencia Boulevard through the interchange with I-5, modifying the ramp configuration to improve overall operation of the interchange, replacing the existing bridge, and constructing a new southbound direct on-ramp.

~~An IS/EA (Tetra Tech, 2000) was finalized in June 2000, resulting in the approval of a FONSI and Negative Declaration. The purpose of the proposed project is to:~~

- ~~• Improve traffic safety and the deficiencies of the existing roadway over I-5 and the interchange~~
- ~~• Increase the capacity and improve the operation of existing roadways~~
- ~~• Alleviate existing and future congestion~~
- ~~• Conform to state, regional, and local plans and policies~~
- ~~• Facilitate the flow of goods and services through the area~~
- ~~• Ensure continued mobility of the public at the state, regional, and local level~~

~~The proposed project would result in adverse impacts to noise levels, air quality, water quality, and plants and animal life; although impacts to water quality, noise levels, and air quality would not be significant. After mitigation, impacts to biological resources would not be significant. An IS/EA (Tetra Tech, 2000) was finalized in June 2000, resulting in the approval of a FONSI and Negative Declaration. The purpose of the proposed project is to:~~

- ~~a) improve traffic safety and the deficiencies of the existing roadway over I-5 and the interchange;~~
- ~~b) increase the capacity and improve the operation of existing roadways;~~
- ~~c) alleviate existing and future congestion;~~

~~d) conform to state, regional, and local plans and policies;~~

~~e) facilitate the flow of goods and service through the area; and~~

~~f) ensure continued mobility of the public at the state, regional, and local level.~~

~~The proposed project would result in adverse impacts to noise levels, air quality, water quality, and plants and animal life, although impacts to water quality, noise levels, and air quality would not be significant. After mitigation, impacts to biological resources would not be significant.~~

8. **Caltrans' Newhall Maintenance Station.** In addition to these roadway projects, Caltrans recently completed construction of a new maintenance facility (Newhall Maintenance Station) between The Old Road and I-5, south of SR-126. This project is not expected to significantly increase traffic volumes or create traffic delays within the I-5/SR-126 Interchange Project vicinity. An Initial Study (Caltrans, 1993) was prepared, resulting in the approval of a Negative Declaration. The purpose of the proposed project is to:

- Relocate the maintenance station to an area with more compatible surrounding land uses
- Provide easier access for maintenance vehicles and employees
- Reduce the crowded conditions at the existing facility

~~8. The proposed project was found to have less-than-substantial impacts to natural features including, but not limited to, plant life, animal life, sensitive habitats, and animal movements. Additionally, the proposed project would have no significant impacts on the environment. An Initial Study (Caltrans, 1993) was prepared, resulting in the approval of a Negative Declaration. The purpose of the proposed project is to:~~

~~a) relocate the maintenance station to an area with more compatible surrounding land uses;~~

~~b) provide easier access for maintenance vehicles and employees; and~~

~~c) reduce the crowded conditions at the existing facility.~~

~~The proposed project was found to have less-than-substantial impacts to natural features including, but not limited to, plant life, animal life, sensitive habitats, and animal movements. Additionally, the proposed project would have no significant impacts on the environment.~~

9. **Santa Clara River Bridge Replacement on I-5.** Major degradation of the Santa Clara Riverbed surrounding the I-5 bridge pilings has occurred as a result of scour and upstream mining. Additionally, the bridge also has indications of structural problems. As a result, Caltrans prepared an Environmental Impact Report/Environmental Assessment (EIR/EA) (Caltrans, 2000a), which was finalized in June 2000. In that document, Caltrans proposes to replace the existing bridge to achieve the following objectives:~~As a result, Caltrans prepared an Environmental Impact Report/Environmental Assessment (EIR/EA) (Caltrans, 2000), which was finalized in~~

~~June 2000. In that document, Caltrans proposes to replace the existing bridge to achieve the following objectives:~~

- ~~• Replace a scour susceptible bridge~~
- ~~• Ensure continued mobility of the public at the state, regional, and local level~~
- ~~• Facilitate the efficient flow of goods and services through the area~~
- ~~• Improve traffic safety~~

- ~~a)replace a scour susceptible bridge;~~
- ~~b)ensure continued mobility of the public at the state, regional, and local level;~~
- ~~c)facilitate the efficient flow of goods and services through the area; and~~
- ~~d)improve traffic safety.~~

~~The bridge replacement would result in the reduction of habitat for endangered species and result in a barrier to the migration or movement of animals. While impacts to all species cannot be fully mitigated, mitigation measures would reduce the level of impact to less than significant.~~  
~~The bridge replacement would result in the reduction of habitat for endangered species and result in a barrier to the migration or movement of animals. While impacts to all species cannot be fully mitigated, mitigation measures would reduce the level of impact to less than significant.~~

10. **SR-126/Commerce Center Drive Interchange Project.** Valencia Company has proposed to construct a grade-separated interchange at the existing, signalized intersection of SR-126 and Commerce Center Drive. The project would also result in the reconfiguration of the existing Henry Mayo Drive/Commerce Center Drive intersection further to the south. The project would increase capacity of the interchange; improve local access and circulation; incorporate planned infrastructure improvements; enhance safety; and accommodate planned growth within the area.

~~IS is being prepared but has not yet been released for public or agency review. The project is anticipated to result in adverse impacts to the Santa Clara River floodplain, noise levels, air quality, water quality, biological resources, and farmland. The level of significance cannot be ascertained until after the completion of the environmental document.~~  
~~An Initial Study (IS) is being prepared but has not yet been released for public or agency review. The project is anticipated to result in adverse impacts to the Santa Clara River floodplain, noise levels, air quality, water quality, biological resources, and farmland. The level of significance cannot be ascertained until after the completion of the environmental document.~~

As a result of these planned commercial/industrial developments and transportation improvement projects, the existing I-5/SR-126 Interchange is expected to experience significant increases in traffic. Both Valencia Company and Caltrans recognize the need to accommodate both the future development and projected increases in traffic, to accommodate increased inter-regional growth and traffic, and to improve circulation in the area and enhance safety at this interchange. To accomplish this, Valencia Company, in cooperation with FHWA, Caltrans, City of Santa Clarita, and Los Angeles County, is proposing that the I-5/SR-126 Interchange be reconstructed and reconfigured. The proposed improvements would increase capacity, improve operations, provide additional interchange movements, improve local access and circulation, incorporate planned

infrastructure improvements, enhance safety, and accommodate planned growth within the study area. Without these improvements, severe congestion would occur due to the expected increase in the average daily and peak-hour traffic volumes on I-5 and SR-126 (Table 2).

## 2.4 Alternatives

### 2.4.1 No-Build Alternative

The existing I-5/SR-126 interchange is a partial interchange with a northbound loop ramp from eastbound SR-126 to northbound I-5, a diamond off-ramp from northbound I-5 to westbound SR-126, and directional ramps from southbound I-5 to westbound SR-126 and eastbound SR-126 to southbound I-5 (Figure 5). The westbound to northbound movement is accommodated via a left turn onto the loop ramp. The existing interchange does not provide direct access from Newhall Ranch Road to southbound I-5, or from southbound I-5 to eastbound Newhall Ranch Road. Indirect access is provided via Rye Canyon Road hook ramps, located 1.6 km (0.99 mile) south of the I-5/SR-126 interchange.

Three projects are under construction or about to begin, but are not yet in operation. They would, however, be operational when the proposed project would begin construction; therefore, as part of the baseline condition, these projects are part of the No-Build Alternative and are listed below:

- The southbound extension of Commerce Center Drive to SR-126 and construction of a signalized at-grade intersection with access to Henry Mayo Drive
- The construction of Newhall Ranch Road as the easterly extension of SR-126 east of the I-5 northbound off-ramp
- Removal of access to Avenue Stanford from SR-126

The No-Build Alternative would preclude construction-related impacts associated with the proposed improvements to the I-5/SR-126 interchange, and there would be no construction costs associated with this alternative. Additionally, no right-of-way acquisitions would be required for the No-Build Alternative. However, the No-Build Alternative would not meet the project purpose and need, as discussed in Sections 1.1 and 1.2, for the following reasons (refer to Section 5.11 for a detailed discussion on the no-build traffic):

- The No-Build Alternative, which results in a LOS F, would not accommodate local circulation and access needs or alleviate congestion and capacity deficiencies.
- It would not be consistent with local and regional planning that calls for an ultimate 6- to 8-lane cross section on SR-126.
- It would not accommodate the forecasted traffic volumes (4,300 vehicles), which exceeds the capacity of the existing facility, thus resulting in an increase in traffic congestion, delay, fuel consumption, and vehicle emissions.
- It would not meet current FHWA or Caltrans standards, which indicate that travel movement be accommodated in all directions at freeway interchanges.

**Insert**

*Figure 5 No-Build Alternative*

## 2.4.2 Alternative A – I-5/SR-126 Diamond Interchange Concept

This alternative proposes the construction of a directional ramp in the northeast quadrant of the I-5/SR-126 interchange to accommodate vehicles traveling westbound on Newhall Ranch Road accessing northbound I-5 (Figure 6). This movement is currently accommodated via a left turn onto the loop ramp. This ramp would provide a two-lane diverge from westbound Newhall Ranch Road and would narrow to one lane before joining northbound I-5.

Modification of the existing I-5 northbound off-ramp would include widening the ramp to two lanes, widening the intersection approach to four lanes to provide one right- and three left-turn lanes at the intersection, and installation of a traffic signal. Modification of the loop ramp from eastbound SR-126 to northbound I-5 would include the elimination of the connection from westbound Newhall Ranch Road and restriping of the traveled way to provide a wider lane to accommodate trucks.

This alternative would reconfigure the existing southbound I-5 directional ramp to SR-126 as a diamond ramp. The southbound off-ramp from I-5 would be widened to two lanes. Approaching SR-126, the two-lane off-ramp would be widened to four lanes, providing dual right- and left-turn lanes. The intersection would be controlled by a traffic signal, which would eliminate weaving conflicts on westbound SR-126.

The eastbound SR-126 to southbound I-5 directional ramp would be widened to two lanes to accommodate the heavy eastbound-to-southbound volume. Traffic from westbound Newhall Ranch Road would access the southbound I-5 directional ramp by turning left at the signalized intersection and merging on the left with traffic on the eastbound SR-126 to southbound I-5 directional ramp.

SR-126 would be widened to four through lanes in each direction. East of the I-5/SR-126 interchange, the widening would go to Newhall Ranch Road. At the intersection with the northbound off-ramp, Newhall Ranch Road would be widened to four lanes and then taper to match the existing roadway east of Vanderbilt Way. SR-126, to the west of the I-5/SR-126 interchange, would be widened before tapering to two lanes to match the existing roadway. A standard concrete barrier would be constructed in the median to separate the eastbound and westbound lanes of SR-126.

Alternative A would address the purpose and need of the project in the following areas (refer to Section 5.11 for a detailed discussion on the proposed project traffic):

- It would provide full interchange movements, with the addition of the new ramp connections, to meet FHWA and Caltrans standards.
- It would be consistent with local and regional planning by accommodating local circulation and access needs.
- It would alleviate congestion and capacity deficiencies by widening SR-126 to its ultimate condition.
- It would accommodate the forecasted area build-out and the resultant increases in traffic volumes to LOS C, as compared to LOS F with the no-build condition.

**Insert**

*Figure 6    Alternative A*

### 2.4.3 Alternative C – I-5/SR-126 Partial Cloverleaf A Interchange Concept

This alternative proposes the construction of a directional ramp in the northeast quadrant of the I-5/SR-126 interchange (similar to Alternative A) to accommodate vehicles traveling westbound on Newhall Ranch Road accessing northbound I-5 (Figure 7). This ramp would provide two lanes at the divergence from Newhall Ranch Road to accommodate westbound exiting traffic, which would then narrow to one lane before joining northbound I-5. Construction of this directional ramp would eliminate the existing left-turn movement from westbound Newhall Ranch Road to the eastbound-to-northbound loop on-ramp.

The I-5 northbound off-ramp to SR-126 would be widened to two lanes. Approaching SR-126, the ramp would flare to four lanes and would provide three left- and one right-turn lane.

To provide access for westbound traffic from Newhall Ranch Road to I-5 south, Alternative C proposes the construction of a loop on-ramp to I-5 in the northwest quadrant of the I-5/SR-126 interchange. The existing southbound off-ramp would be realigned/reconstructed, and the diverging end would be relocated further to the north to allow for the construction of this loop ramp.

The southbound I-5 off-ramp to SR-126 would be widened to four lanes approaching the intersection with two right- and two left-turn lanes. The southbound-to-eastbound left-turn lane would be accommodated through a two-phase traffic signal at this intersection. The right-turn lanes would be controlled by the signal to eliminate potential westbound weaving conflicts between the southbound off-ramp and the future off-ramp to Commerce Center Drive.

The eastbound SR-126 to southbound I-5 ramp would be a two-lane connector ramp to accommodate heavy eastbound-to-southbound volume. Where the ramp merges with southbound I-5, the right lane of the connector would be dropped, and an auxiliary lane would be added to the southbound mainline. The auxiliary lane would extend to the southbound off-ramp to The Old Road, north of Rye Canyon Road.

SR-126 would be widened as described for Alternative A.

Alternative C would require 5,250 square meters of right-of-way in the northwest quadrant of the I-5/SR-126 interchange. The needed area is undeveloped land located in one parcel, which is owned by Newhall Land & Farming Company, of which Valencia Company is a subsidiary. In addition, with the abandonment of the existing eastbound and westbound hook ramps along SR-126, there is an excess right-of-way of 27,538 square meters. A post-2020 plan for the addition of a northbound-to-westbound flyover and a southbound-to-westbound connector requires that approximately 15,000 square meters of right-of-way would be needed at that time. This future right-of-way need would be reserved at this time. Valencia Company would donate all needed right-of-way for construction of the interchange. Further analysis of right-of-way issues, including the possible exchange for the excess right-of-way, would continue during the detailed design of the project.

Overall, under this alternative there are no relocations, partial or full acquisitions of property not owned by Newhall Land & Farming Company, or any other major right-of-way-related issues.

*Figure 7    Alternative C*

Alternative C would address the project's purpose and need in the following areas (refer to Section 5.11 for a detailed discussion on the proposed project traffic):

- It would provide full interchange movements, with the addition of the new ramp connections, to meet FHWA and Caltrans standards.
- It would be consistent with local and regional planning by accommodating local circulation and access needs.
- It would alleviate congestion and capacity deficiencies by widening SR-126 to its ultimate condition.
- It would accommodate the forecasted area build-out and the resultant increases in traffic volumes to LOS C, as compared to LOS F with the no-build condition.

Based on the following operational and safety benefits, Alternative C is preferred over Alternative A:

- Alternative C eliminates the westbound-to-southbound left turn at the I-5/SR-126 interchange, which improves operations (reduces delay) at the southbound ramp terminal intersection by constructing a free-flow loop.
- The eastbound SR-126 to southbound I-5 has been designed as a two-lane connector in Alternative C with an auxiliary lane along I-5 to the Rye Canyon Road exit ramp. The auxiliary lane reduces weaving conflicts and improves southbound I-5 mainline operations.

## 3 Affected Environment

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### 3.1 Topography and Geology

The I-5/SR-126 interchange is located in northern Los Angeles County. The area is generally defined by significant mountain ridges of the San Gabriel, Santa Susana, and Sierra Pelona Mountains, in addition to several canyons, valleys, and the Santa Clara River and Castaic Creek beds. The Santa Clara River originates approximately 31 miles east-southeast of the project site in the San Gabriel Mountains. Castaic Creek originates approximately 27 km (17 miles) north of the project site in the Angeles National Forest. These two drainage courses merge approximately 3.2 km (2 miles) southwest of the I-5/SR-126 interchange.

The climate of the area can be classified as “valley marginal”; the average annual precipitation varies between 10 and 40 inches (25.4 and 101.6 centimeters [cm]) per year (City of Santa Clarita, 1997). Winter storms from the northwest account for 90 percent of the rainfall in the area, with summer thunderstorms from tropical depressions accounting for the rest.

The project area is underlain by sedimentary bedrock of the Saugus Formation. Overlying the bedrock are terrace deposits, alluvium, slopewash, and artificial fills. The Holser and San Gabriel Faults are the closest faults to the I-5/SR-126 interchange.

### 3.2 Land Use and Planning

The proposed project is located in a fast-growing area within unincorporated Los Angeles County northwest of the City of Santa Clarita, in the northwest portion of the Santa Clarita Valley. To the southeast of I-5/SR-126 is the community of Valencia, within the City of Santa Clarita. Valencia is a master-planned community that is being developed in accordance with a plan that was designed in the early 1960s to create a unified urban environment on property owned by Newhall Land and Farming Company.

#### 3.2.1 Existing Land Uses

In general, current land use patterns west of I-5 reflect a mixture of open space, urban, and rural (Figure 8). The immediate project area has commercial and industrial properties; agriculture uses; and vacant land consisting of either undeveloped commercial/industrial areas, hills, or floodplains. There are no residential properties within the proposed project area.

The surrounding urbanized development supports a variety of commercial and industrial businesses within Valencia Commerce Center, located northwest of the I-5/SR-126 interchange, and Rye Canyon Business Center, located southeast of the interchange. Development of both commercial areas is ongoing. Valencia Commerce Center is a major expansion of Valencia Industrial Center on approximately 581 hectares (1,436 acres). It

includes 284 hectares (702 acres) of industrial park, with approximately 102 hectares (10,990,000 square feet) of industrial space, 12 hectares (30 acres) of general commercial area, and 36.8 hectares (91 acres) of office park. The area also has plans for a 4.5-hectare (11-acre) recreational area, jogging trails, and an equestrian trail. Rye Canyon Business Center is situated on approximately 152 hectares (377 acres), with more than 20 buildings totaling approximately 4.4 hectares (475,127 square feet).

There are no public utilities or facilities within the project vicinity. A newly constructed Caltrans Maintenance Facility is located in the southeast quadrant of the I-5/SR-126 interchange, east of The Old Road. No pedestrian or bicycle facilities are located within the area, and there are no future plans for these facilities in the area.

### 3.2.2 Proposed Developments

There are no plans for new residential, commercial, or industrial developments within the proposed project area. However, Valencia Commerce Center and Rye Canyon Business Center are currently developing planned expansions immediately outside of the project area, as discussed in Section 2.3. In addition, to the west of the project area, the Newhall Ranch specific plan details the addition of a major residential and commercial development. The City of Santa Clarita is also developing plans for the North Valencia Annexation project. This project would involve the annexation of 347 hectares (858 acres) of land into the City of Santa Clarita and approval for a mixed residential, commercial, office, industrial, conservation, and recreation development project.

### 3.2.3 Local and Regional Land Use Plans

The proposed project is located within the jurisdiction of Los Angeles County. As such, the proposed project is subject to the General Plan policies and Zoning Ordinances of Los Angeles County. Policies of the General Plan are presented in the Santa Clarita Valley Area Plan, developed in 1984 and amended in 1990.

The Santa Clarita Valley Area Plan is a portion of the Los Angeles County General Plan, which provides a framework to guide decisionmakers in developing policies for the unincorporated areas of the Santa Clarita Valley. The following policies from the Santa Clarita Valley Area Plan are relevant to the proposed project:

#### **Land Use Element**

Policy 9.4 – Encourage the development of a public transportation system to meet resident requirements for access to public and private services, employment, and activity centers consistent with demand.

#### **Economic Development Element**

Policy 1.3 – Support infrastructure improvements in appropriate locations that contribute to development or expansion of employment producing uses.

#### **Circulation Element**

Policy 2.1 – Encourage the State of California to improve the capacity of the Golden State and Antelope Valley Freeways as traffic volumes dictate.

Route 126 from the Antelope Valley Freeway to the Ventura County boundary is also recommended for construction as an expressway.

Policy 2.3 – Encourage the State of California to expand the access to the freeway system as needed to serve the area and to maximize freeway capacity.

The City of Santa Clarita has its own General Plan (1991), which provides guidance for the development of the City. The following policy from the City of Santa Clarita General Plan is also relevant to the proposed project:

#### **Land Use Element**

Policy 7.1 – Ensure demand for public facilities and services does not exceed the ability to provide and maintain such facilities and services; necessary facility improvements should precede or be coordinated with future development.

### **3.3 Farmland**

Cultivated farmland, consisting of a variety of row crops, is located west of I-5 between SR-126 and Henry Mayo Drive. This land has been classified as both prime farmland and farmland of statewide importance by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Natural Resources Conservation Service, as required by the Farmland Protection Policy Act (FPPA) in 1981. Uncultivated land that is also classified as prime farmland and farmland of statewide importance is also located within the proposed project area. These areas are shown in Figure 9.

### **3.4 Social and Economic Conditions**

#### **3.4.1 Population**

Both Los Angeles County and the City of Santa Clarita have experienced rapid population growth over the past several decades, facilitated by construction of a major freeway network and the gradual migration of large-scale employers into northern Los Angeles County. Since incorporation, the nearby City of Santa Clarita has continued to grow at a relatively rapid rate. The city is currently home to about 131,000 residents and is expected to grow to over 188,000 by 2020, representing a 1.6 percent average annual growth rate.

#### **3.4.2 Housing**

The Santa Clarita Valley's rapid growth is expected to continue until current economic or housing conditions change. The valley is perceived as a very attractive place to live, and there is a strong housing market (Valencia Company, 1999c). Growth in the number of housing units within the Santa Clarita Valley is supported by the goals of the Santa Clarita Area Plan and the City's General Plan, which seek to create a balance of jobs and housing. At the present time, the area is housing rich, but job poor. The County's Santa Clarita Area Plan includes approximately 404.6 hectares (10,000 acres) of proposed new development outside the City of Santa Clarita. Most of this land is planned for single- and multiple-

family residences, although significant areas are planned for the needed industrial and commercial land uses.

## Figure 8- Land Uses

## Figure 9      Farmland

### 3.4.3 Employment

Although the Santa Clarita Valley is largely recognized as a suburban residential community, the City of Santa Clarita and surrounding development within the jurisdiction of Los Angeles County includes a diversity of employment opportunities. The largest employers in the area include Six Flags Magic Mountain (3,000 employees), Henry Mayo Newhall Memorial Hospital (1,072 employees), and the William S. Hart Unified School District (650 employees). The local labor force of about 43,000 is employed in a range of occupations. The largest occupational types include professional/technical (20.2 percent of the labor force), management (17.2 percent), clerical (16.8 percent), and sales (14.3 percent).

Valencia Commerce Center is located northeast of the I-5/SR-126 interchange. As discussed in Section 2.3, it is a major expansion of Valencia Industrial Center and is forecast to grow from the existing 20 hectares (49.9 acres) to approximately 120 hectares (296.5 acres) by the year 2020.

## 3.5 Air Quality

The project area is located in the South Coast Air Basin (SCAB), a coastal plain with connecting broad valleys and low hills, bounded by the Pacific Ocean to the southwest and high mountains to the north and east. The climate of SCAB is mild, tempered by cool sea breezes. With light average wind speeds, the atmosphere of SCAB has a limited capability to disperse air contaminants horizontally. During periods of air stagnation, pollutants remaining in SCAB are trapped and accumulate. Vertical dispersion of pollutants is hampered by the presence of a persistent inversion layer (typically 0.61 km [2,000 feet] or less above sea level). Pollutants released to the atmosphere at or near ground level tend to form a uniform mixture between the ground and inversion layer base (SCAQMD, 1993).

The potential for high pollution levels varies seasonally for many contaminants. In the summer, reaction between reactive organic compounds (ROC) and oxides of nitrogen (NO<sub>x</sub>) can form photochemical oxidants, mainly ozone. In the winter, high levels of NO<sub>x</sub> can exist because of extremely low inversions, air stagnation during the late night and early morning hours, and the lack of intense sunlight that is needed for photochemical reactions. When strong inversions are formed on winter nights and are coupled with near-calm winds, carbon monoxide from automobile exhausts becomes highly concentrated. During the spring and summer, when fairly deep marine layers are frequently found in SCAB, sulfate concentrations are at their peak (SCAQMD, 1993).

SCAQMD operates a network of ambient monitoring stations within SCAB. The I-5/SR-126 interchange lies within SCAB located in the southwestern portion of the state, which includes the greater Los Angeles metropolitan area. The nearest representative monitoring station for this project is located in Santa Clarita. Table 5 lists the pollutant levels recorded at this station from 1994 to 1996. The area is classified as nonattainment for ozone, carbon monoxide (CO), and respirable particulate matter (PM<sub>10</sub>) and as shown in the table, ozone and PM<sub>10</sub> exceeded the California standard on at least 5 occasions during each of these 3 years. Concentrations of sulfur dioxide, sulfates, lead, and visibility-reducing particles were not measured at this station; however, this area was either classified as “attainment” or “unclassified” for these four components in 1998 (CARB, 1999).

**TABLE 5**  
Summary of Ambient Monitoring Levels at the Santa Clarita Station

Pollutant	Averaging Time	1994	1995	1996
CO (parts per million [ppm])	1-Hour	8 (0)	7 (0)	7 (0)
	8-Hour	3.9 (0)	4.1 (0)	3.9 (0)
Ozone (ppm)	1-Hour	0.26 (118)	0.21 (71)	0.17 (68)
Nitrogen Dioxide (ppm)	Annual Average	0.032	0.030	NA <sup>a</sup>
	1-Hour	0.12 (0)	0.16 (0)	NA <sup>a</sup>
PM <sub>10</sub> (micrograms per cubic meter [µg/m <sup>3</sup> ])	Annual Geometric Mean	31.7 <sup>b</sup>	31.2	29.6
	Annual Arithmetic Mean	35.8 <sup>b</sup>	37.0	33.1
	24-Hour	66 (13) <sup>c</sup>	87 (13) <sup>c</sup>	91 (5) <sup>c</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Nitrogen dioxide was not measured at this site in 1996.

<sup>b</sup> Data presented are valid but incomplete in that an insufficient number of valid data points were collected to meet EPA and/or Air Resources Board (ARB) criteria for representativeness.

<sup>c</sup> 24-hour PM<sub>10</sub> samples were collected on 58 days in 1994, 61 days in 1995, and 53 days in 1996.

Notes:

Hydrogen sulfide, vinyl chloride, and visibility-reducing particles are not monitored in SCAB.

( ) = number of days in which a violation of either the state or national standard, whichever is more stringent, was recorded during the year.

Source: California Air Resources Board, California Air Quality Data, Annual Summaries, 1994-1996.

## 3.6 Water Resources

### 3.6.1 Surface Water

The proposed project is located within the vicinity of the Santa Clara River, which originates in Soledad Canyon in the San Gabriel Mountains, approximately 50 km (31 miles) east-southeast of the project site. The river drains an area of about 103.6 square km (400 square miles) at its confluence with Castaic Creek. Within the project area, the river flows west, crossing I-5 south of the I-5/SR-126 interchange, to the coast where it drains into the Pacific Ocean near the City of San Buenaventura. The Santa Clara River is not a wild or scenic river, as designated by the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System (National Park Service, National Wild and Scenic Rivers System, 1999).

In the project vicinity, the Santa Clara River is a permanent stream with highly seasonal flows ranging from 1.1 to 2.0 cubic meters per second (cms) (40 to 70 cubic feet per second [cfs]) during the winter months, and less than 0.8 cms (3 cfs) during the low-flow, summer season (USGS, Water Resources Data, Santa Clara River at Saugus). Total annual precipitation in the area averages approximately 45 cm (18 inches) per year, with almost all precipitation in the November through March period (National Weather Service, 1999).

The County of Los Angeles has designated the Santa Clara River as a Significant Ecological Area (SEA). This designation was made due to the presence of habitat for several special-status species, discussed in Section 3.8.3.

The project area is not located within the coastal zone management program area, and no coastal barriers are located within the project area.

### 3.6.2 Groundwater

The proposed project is located within the Eastern Groundwater Basin of the Santa Clara River Valley Basin. The Basin includes alluvial sediments along the river and its tributaries, and deeper Saugus Formation sediments that underlie the alluvium. Depth to water in the alluvial aquifer varies greatly due to the seasonal and long-term variation in the amount of recharge and discharge.

The Los Angeles Regional Water Quality Control Board (RWQCB) has designated four existing beneficial uses for groundwater in the project area. These include municipal/domestic water supply, industrial service supply, industrial process supply, and agricultural supply. The majority of water extraction within the Santa Clarita Valley occurs along the Santa Clara River. The largest groundwater user in the project area is Newhall Land and Farming Company, which operates 25 to 30 wells primarily for agricultural purposes. Several other private water purveyors also extract groundwater for municipal and industrial uses. These include Los Angeles County Waterworks District No. 35 (for the Wayside Honor Rancho), Santa Clarita Water Company, Newhall County Water District, and Valencia Water Company. Total groundwater extractions by the purveyors from the alluvial aquifer ranged between 9.7 to 17 cubic meters (12,000 to 21,000 acre-feet) from 1987 to 1994 (Castaic Lake Water Agency, 1996).

## 3.7 Wetlands

Under Section 404 of the Clean Water Act, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (ACOE) regulates the discharge of fill and dredged material into “waters of the United States,” which are broadly defined in 33 *Code of Federal Regulations* (CFR) 328.3(a). The limits of ACOE 404 jurisdiction are defined as the ordinary high water mark, unless adjacent wetlands are present. The term “ordinary high water mark” means the line on the shore or edge of a channel established by the fluctuation of water and indicated by physical characteristics such as a clear natural line impressed on the bank, shelving, destruction of vegetation, debris, etc. The Final Environmental Impact Statement/Environmental Impact Report (EIS/EIR) for the 404 Permit and 1603 Permit for Portions of the Santa Clara River and Its Tributaries (U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and California Department of Fish and Game, 1998) discussed the delineation of wetlands in the vicinity of this proposed project. In that document, ACOE and the applicant agreed to the limits of the jurisdiction of ACOE for the analysis of the EIS/EIR. The proposed project is located well outside the jurisdictional wetland boundary determined in that document.

A recent (September 1999) biological constraints survey was conducted for this proposed project. As part of the constraints survey, a search of available, relevant literature was conducted for the proposed project area; and a survey of the project site was also conducted. There were no indications of wetlands within the proposed project area.

## 3.8 Vegetation and Wildlife Resources

As discussed above, a biological constraints survey was conducted for this proposed project. The findings of this survey are summarized below. Additionally, there are no fisheries within the project area.

### 3.8.1 Vegetation

Vegetation within the study area includes mixed sage scrub, California annual grassland, mixed sage scrub/California grassland ecotone, disturbed/ruderal, ornamental, and developed.

The mixed sage scrub vegetation type is located on the hills to the east of I-5. The dominant species within this vegetation type include California sagebrush (*Artemisia californica*), black sage (*Salvia mellifera*), buckwheat (*Eriogonum fasciculatum*), and Our Lord's candle (*Yucca whipplei*). Other species present include bush sunflower (*Encelia californica*), fourwing saltbush (*Atriplex canescens ssp. canescens*), cudweed aster (*Lessingia filaginifolia*), giant wild rye (*Leymus condensatus*), deerweed (*Lotus scoparius*), California matchweed (*Gutierrezia californica*), black mustard (*Brassica nigra*), and foxtail chess (*Bromus madritensis ssp. rubens*).

The mixed sage scrub/California grassland ecotone is located on one spot in the I-5 right-of-way. This habitat is an isolated patch of mixed sage scrub species with an understory of annual grasses.

California annual grassland is located primarily on the lower slopes of the hills and on the flat areas below the hills east of I-5. The dominant species in these areas consist of non-native, invasive species such as foxtail chess (*Bromus madritensis ssp. rubens*), black mustard, Mediterranean schismus (*Schismus barbatus*), and puncture vine (*Tribulus terrestris*).

Disturbed/ruderal areas are typically located adjacent to roads and other developed areas. These areas are primarily composed of bare ground with a low density of non-native and weedy species. Species within this vegetation type include prickly lettuce (*Lactuca serriola*), telegraph weed (*Heterotheca grandiflora*), tree tobacco (*Nicotiana glauca*), common purslane (*Portulaca oleracea*), chaparral nightshade (*Solanum xanti*), western ragweed (*Ambrosia psilostachya*), mustard (*Brassica sp.*), western sunflower (*Helianthus annuus*), Russian thistle (*Salsola australis*), sand wash butterweed (*Senecio flaccidus var. douglasii*), jimsonweed (*Datura wrightii*), California croton (*Croton californicus*), slender oat (*Avena sp.*), doveweed (*Eremocarpus setiger*), Bermuda grass (*Cynodon dactylon*), and Mexican elderberry (*Sambucus mexicana*). Non-native plant species that are present within the project area are common within areas in Southern California (such as existing freeway interchanges) that have been subject to past disturbance. The proposed project is not expected to substantially increase the occurrence of these weeds outside the project limits.

Ornamental species, windrows, and remnant native trees along roads include Fremont cottonwood (*Populus fremontii ssp. fremontii*), Mexican elderberry, mulberry (*Morus sp.*), gum (*Eucalyptus sp.*), liquidambar (*Liquidambar sp.*), pampas grass (*Cortaderia sp.*), London plane tree (*Platanus acerifolia*), Peruvian pepper tree (*Schinus molle*), flowering plum (*Prunus sp.*), western sycamore (*Platanus racemosa*), and ash (*Fraxinus sp.*).

Developed areas and agricultural fields contain little vegetation. Agricultural fields within the study area are currently active and are located west of I-5 both north and south of SR-126. Disturbed/ruderal areas surround the fields. Developed areas include both office buildings and roads throughout the study area. Developed areas are surrounded by disturbed/ruderal or ornamental vegetation.

### 3.8.2 Wildlife Habitat

The vegetation types within the study area provide habitat for a host of wildlife species. Common bird species observed during the survey included great blue heron (*Ardea herodias*), red-tailed hawk (*Buteo jamaicensis*), killdeer (*Charadrius vociferus*), rock dove (*Columba livia*), mourning dove (*Zenaida macroura*), loggerhead shrike (*Lanius ludovicianus*), western scrub jay (*Aphelocoma californica*), American crow (*Corvus brachyrhynchos*), common raven (*Corvus corax*), Bewick's wren (*Thryomanes bewickii*), wrentit (*Chamaea fasciata*), California thrasher (*Toxostoma redivivum*), and California towhee (*Pipilo crissalis*). The red-tailed hawk, red-shouldered hawk (*Buteo lineatus*), and American kestrel (*Falco sparverius*) are expected to forage within the study area and could nest in the larger trees or telephone poles on the site. No raptor nests were observed within the study area; however, two raptor nests were observed just offsite, one in a cottonwood tree and one on a telephone pole.

Mammal species observed included California ground squirrel (*Spermophilus beecheyi*) and gray squirrel (*Sciurus griseus*). Other species expected to occur include Botta's pocket gopher (*Thomomys bottae*), white-footed deer mouse (*Peromyscus maniculatus*), house mouse (*Mus musculus*), desert cottontail (*Sylvilagus audubonii*), San Diego Black-tailed jackrabbit (*Lepus californica bennettii*), striped skunk (*Mephitis mephitis*), Virginia opossum (*Didelphis virginianus*), mule deer (*Odocoileus hemionus*), and coyote (*Canis latrans*).

Common reptiles observed on the site included side blotched lizard (*Uta stansburiana*) and western fence lizard (*Sceloporus occidentalis*). No amphibians were observed on the site. Additional common reptile species expected to occur within the study area include southern alligator lizard (*Elgaria multicarinata*), striped racer (*Masticophis lateralis*), gopher snake (*Pituophis catenifer*), and western rattlesnake (*Crotalus viridis*). Common amphibian species expected to occur on the site include California treefrog (*Hyla cadaverina*), Pacific treefrog (*Hyla regilla*), and bullfrog (*Rana catesbeiana*).

### 3.8.3 Special-Status Plant and Wildlife Species

Plants or animals may be considered to have "special status" due to declining populations, vulnerability to habitat change, or restricted distributions. Certain special-status species have been listed as Threatened or Endangered under state and/or federal Endangered Species Acts (ESA).

#### 3.8.3.1 Plant Species

Six special-interest plant species could occur in the project vicinity. Two of these species are state and/or federally listed endangered species: Nevin's barberry (*Berberis nevini*) and slender-horned spineflower (*Dodecahema leptoceras*). Suitable habitat is not present for either of these species within the project area; however, adjacent habitat along the Santa Clara River could potentially support these species. The remaining four species, listed below, have a potential to occur within the study area in the mixed sage scrub:

- Slender mariposa lily (*Calochortus clavatus* var. *gracilis*)
- Plummer's mariposa lily (*Calochortus plummerae*)
- Peirson's morning-glory (*Calystegia peirsonii*)
- Palmer's grapplinghook (*Harpagonella palmeri*)

### 3.8.3.2 Wildlife Species

~~Nine~~ Ten special-interest wildlife species could occur in the project vicinity and are as follows:

- Unarmored threespine stickleback (*Gasterosteus aculeatus williamsoni*) – a federal and California endangered species
- Arroyo chub (*Gila orcutti*) – a federal Species of Concern and a California Species of Special Concern
- Santa Ana sucker (*Catostomus santaanae*) – a federally Proposed threatened species and a California Species of Special Concern
- Arroyo southwestern toad (*Bufo microscaphus californicus*) – federally endangered and a California Species of Special Concern
- Two-striped garter snake (*Thamnophis hammondi*) – a federal Species of Concern, a California Species of Special Concern, and a California Department of Fish and Game (CDFG) protected species
- Western pond turtle (*Clemmys marmorata*) – a state and federal Species of Concern
- San Diego horned lizard (*Phrynosoma coronatum blainvillei*) -- a federal Species of Concern, a California Species of Special Concern, and a CDFG Special Animal
- Least Bell's vireo (*Vireo bellii pusillus*) – federal and California endangered species
- Southwestern willow flycatcher (*Empidonax traillii extimus*) – federal and California endangered species
- San Diego Black-tailed jackrabbit (*Lepus californica bennettii*) – California Species of Special Concern

Suitable habitat is not present for any of the fish, reptile (with the exception of the San Diego horned lizard), amphibian, or bird species within the immediate project area. However, the nearby Santa Clara River and Castaic Creek are potential habitat for the fish, reptile, and amphibian species; and the adjacent lowland riparian woodlands are potential habitat for the bird species. Many trees within the study area have the potential to be used for nesting by raptors; however, none are located within the project area. Potential habitat for the San Diego horned lizard is present on the mid to upper slopes of the hills to the east of I-5. This species probably would not occur on the lower slopes since the ground between shrubs is covered in annual grassland.

## 3.9 Floodplain

Land adjacent to the Santa Clara River and Castaic Creek is located in the Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA) 100-year floodplain, and in the Capital Floodplain designated by the Los Angeles County Department of Public Works (LACDPW).

The Capital Floodplain includes all land subject to flooding during a Capital Flood<sup>1</sup>. According to the County Floodplain Ordinance, land development in the Capital Floodplain can occur if appropriate flood protective measures are implemented according to the requirements of the LACDPW. These measures require that the bottom elevations of all structures be at least 1 foot above the design flood. In addition, any structures that would increase the design flood more than 0.3 m (1 foot) must be offset by nearby approved stream improvements. As shown in Figure 10, the proposed project is not located within the 100-year floodplain.

### 3.10 Historic and Cultural Resources

A study to identify potentially historic properties in the project's Area of Potential Effects (APE) and to evaluate the eligibility of any identified properties for listing in the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) was conducted in October 1999. The Historic Property Survey Report (HPSR) prepared for the project indicates that no archaeological resources were found in the project area, on the basis of pedestrian examinations done in the field. Furthermore, no historic properties were identified in the project area.

The findings showed that the buildings located in the APE (Figure 11) consist of suburban commercial and office buildings. The commercial and office buildings in the APE date from post-1970. None of the buildings exhibit exceptional architectural importance, nor do they meet National Register criteria.

The South Central Coastal Information Center, University of California, Los Angeles, undertook a records search. The records search revealed no previously recorded historic or prehistoric resources within a 1.6-km (1-mile) radius of the project area. Records of the Caltrans Cultural Resources Staff indicate that two cultural resources (CA-Lan-961H and CA-Lan-962H) do exist within a 1.6-km (1-mile) radius of the project, but outside of the APE. Additionally, Caltrans staff records, obtained in person from the South Central Coastal Information Center, University of California, Los Angeles, indicate that an unrecorded, but possibly prehistoric village site with burials exists adjacent to the southwest quadrant of the APE. A physical examination of the surface area did not indicate the presence of culturally sensitive resources, although these resources may be located in subsurface deposits within the project area.

The NRHP lists no properties within a 1.6-km (1-mile) radius. Also, the listings of the California Historical Landmarks (1990), California Department of Parks and Recreation, indicate that there are no California Historical Landmarks within a 1.6-km (1-mile) radius of the project area. The California Points of Historical Interest (1992) also identifies no properties within a 1.6-km (1-mile) radius of the project area.

<sup>1</sup> A Capital Flood is defined as the discharge resulting from a hypothetical 4-day storm with a 50-year return period falling on a saturated watershed with debris from a wildfire. The Capital Flood discharge greatly exceeds the 100-year discharge calculated by FEMA.

## Insert

*Figure 10 Floodplain*

## Insert

*Figure 11 Area Of Potential Effects*

### 3.11 Hazardous Waste

An Initial Site Assessment (ISA) was conducted for the proposed project (Valencia Company, 1999a). The following work was conducted as part of the ISA:

- A site reconnaissance was performed in May 1998 to visually inspect the site, complete the Caltrans ISA Checklist, assess current land usage, and identify recognized environmental conditions that may be present at the properties.
- Regulatory agency databases and six historical aerial photographs were reviewed to identify potentially contaminated sites located at or adjacent to the proposed project.
- A chain-of-title search was performed to determine current and previous ownership information, as well as indicate whether any leases for oil exploration activities were given for the project area.
- A standard Caltrans ISA Checklist was completed for the project site.

The following list summarizes the conclusions regarding potential recognized environmental conditions for the project area:

- Past land use records indicate that portions of the project area were farmland from at least 1952 (date of earliest aerial photograph reviewed) to 1972. As a result of this past land use, elevated levels of nitrates in the groundwater potentially exist at the site. In addition, there is a potential for residual concentration of pesticides/herbicides in soil resulting from routine applications associated with past agricultural land use at the subject areas.
- No recognized environmental conditions were observed during a May 1998 site visit. In addition, no evidence of recognized environmental conditions was observed at directly adjacent properties during the site visit.
- A review of the environmental databases identified a number of nearby sites with potential environmental concerns. Elevated levels of petroleum in soils and groundwater resulting from underground storage tank (UST) releases have occurred at locations within 0.2 km (1/8 mile) of the proposed project. In addition, a solid waste landfill with reported minor groundwater contamination is located within 0.4 km (1/4 mile) of the subject area. Groundwater elevation is between 3 and 6 m (10 and 20 feet) below ground surface.
- Research of chain-of-title information did not reveal leases for oil exploration or other leases that indicated environmental concern.

### 3.12 Visual

The Santa Clarita Valley consists of a mixture of undeveloped and developed landscapes. It is a rapidly growing region that has experienced substantial changes in land use over the past 10 years with the continual expansion of the urban land uses. The valley has been transformed from a landscape dominated by croplands on the floodplain with undeveloped hills, to a complex urban landscape with scattered open space.

The project area is bounded by low hillsides, which are the dominant visual features in the project area. The Santa Clara River represents an important visual feature; however, views of the river are often obscured because (1) it is a low-lying element of the landscape; (2) the visual elements of the river are mostly low and diffuse, such as barren sand and low-growing shrubs; (3) the viewing locations for the river and its tributaries are relatively limited; and (4) many portions of the river are adjacent to busy urban roadways where views are mostly obscured or unavailable because the attention of motorists is directed to the roadway.

The lands north of the Santa Clara River include a mixture of agriculture along The Old Road, limited commercial along Henry Mayo Drive, and recreational (Valencia Travel Village). Undeveloped open space on steep hills occurs west of Six Flags Magic Mountain Amusement Park and south of the river.

The riverbed is relatively wide with steep banks and very dense woodland vegetation. There are noteworthy hills with native vegetation along the south side of the river that provide a scenic background. The developing Valencia Commerce Center along the north side of the river contrasts sharply with the natural landscape south of SR-126.

Public viewing locations of the proposed project include Valencia Travel Village along SR-126 and the commercial properties north and south of SR-126. The project area is not within a visually sensitive setting due to the developing commercial area and restricted views of the Santa Clara River.

### 3.13 Noise

A noise analysis for the proposed project was prepared in accordance with FHWA's *Procedures for Abatement of Highway Traffic Noise and Construction Noise* (23 CFR 772.11[e][1] and [2]). Caltrans' *Traffic Noise Analysis Protocol for New Highway Construction and Highway Reconstruction Projects* (October 1998) recommends a screening procedure intended to determine whether a detailed noise analysis is necessary for a highway construction project. If a project passes the screening procedure, further analysis is normally not necessary.

Figure 8 in Section 3.2 shows the land uses within the proposed project area. The project area includes commercial, open space, and public facility uses. Figure 8 in Section 3.2 shows the land uses within the proposed project area. The project area includes commercial, open space, and public facility uses. There are neither any existing noise-sensitive receiver locations nor any undeveloped lands for which noise-sensitive development is "planned, designed, and programmed" in the vicinity of the I-5/SR-126 project. There are no outdoor areas of frequent human use within the commercial areas. Therefore, the project passes the first step of the above screening procedure, and no documentation of existing noise levels or further analysis is necessary. As a result, a detailed noise study was not prepared for this project. ~~There are no outdoor areas of frequent human use within the commercial areas. Therefore, the project passes the first step of the above screening procedure, and no documentation of existing noise levels or further analysis is necessary. As a result, a detailed noise study was not prepared for this project.~~

### 3.14 Transportation and Traffic Circulation

In addition to being heavily used as a commuter route, I-5 is a major north-south interstate transportation route that is used for international, interstate, inter-regional, and intraregional travel and movement of goods. Within the State of California, I-5 extends from the international boundary at Tijuana, Mexico, to the Oregon State line. In Los Angeles County, I-5 spans a distance of 142.6 km (88.6 miles) from the Orange County line to the Kern County line and is known as the Santa Ana and the Golden State Freeway between those limits. I-5 is part of the Interstate System of Highways and is included in the NHS. Because I-5 is a major local and regional truck route, it is on the SHELL Route System.

SR-126 extends westward from the I-5 interchange to U.S. 101 in Ventura and is included in the State Freeway and Expressway System. The route is used heavily between I-5 and the Ventura Coast. East of the I-5/SR-126 interchange at the I-5 northbound off-ramp, SR-126 connects to Newhall Ranch Road. Newhall Ranch Road would be constructed by the end of 2001. As a result of the Santa Clarita City Council adopted resolution No. 97-144, Newhall Ranch Road would become an ultimate six- to eight-lane city arterial. South of the I-5/SR-126 interchange, SR-126 extends easterly from I-5 via Magic Mountain Parkway.

The existing I-5/SR-126 interchange does not provide full movement as recommended by Caltrans and FHWA. Currently, there is no direct connector from southbound I-5 to eastbound SR-126, and from westbound SR-126 to southbound I-5. Commuters must utilize the southbound hook ramps to The Old Road near Rye Canyon Road.

The existing hook ramps on SR-126, west of the I-5 interchange, provide access to the local streets and businesses. Access to Henry Mayo Drive is currently provided by the eastbound hook ramps from SR-126. The Old Road can be accessed via the westbound SR-126 hook ramps.

The existing ADT volumes from a 1997 traffic count for the I-5 corridor and adjacent arterials are shown in Figure 2 in Section 1.2.2. The figure shows that the interchange experiences a high volume of traffic, with 89,000 vehicles traveling along I-5 daily. The existing peak-hour traffic volumes for the I-5/SR-126 interchange are illustrated in Figure 3 in Section 1.2.2. The figure shows that the highest volume of traffic is on the eastbound SR-126 connection to southbound I-5. The figure also shows that the existing hook ramps are not heavily used. The LOS for the existing study area, based on the above criteria and 1997 traffic volumes, is shown in Table 6.

**TABLE 6**  
Existing Levels of Service

Location	Existing			
	A.M.	LOS	P.M.	LOS
I-5 Northbound Ramps and SR-126	.45	A	.39	A
The Old Road SR-126 Westbound	.36	A	.31	A
The Old Road and Henry Mayo Drive	.40	A	.40	A

The above data show that, within the study area, the existing intersections operate at an LOS A during both the a.m. and p.m. peak hours.

## 4 Environmental Evaluation

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Pursuant to the Caltrans *Environmental Handbook, Volume 1* (Caltrans, 1995a), a summary of the findings of this report concerning the environmental effects of the project is presented in the form of an Environmental Significance Checklist. A discussion of the responses to the checklist questions containing an asterisk is provided in Section 5 of this document. Responses to the other checklist questions are included in the PEER. Based on the PEER, focused technical studies were prepared to examine the environmental consequences of the proposed project with respect to air quality, biology, cultural resources, and hazardous materials. Those technical studies are incorporated into the report by reference and are available for review at The Valencia Company<sup>1</sup>. The discussion of the environmental evaluation presented in Section 5 is primarily a summary of the results of these technical studies.

### Environmental Significance Checklist

This checklist was used to identify physical, biological, social, and economic factors that might be affected by the proposed project. In many cases, the background studies performed in connection with this project clearly indicate that the project would not affect a particular item. A “No” answer in the first column documents this determination. A discussion is also provided for questions with asterisks, because further research was required for either CEQA or National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) discussion purposes.

<b>PHYSICAL</b> - Will the proposal either directly or indirectly:		<b>Yes or No?</b>	<b>If yes, is it significant?</b>
		<b>Yes or No?</b>	
1.	Appreciably change the topography or ground surface relief features?	No	
2.	Destroy, cover, or modify any unique geologic, paleontologic, or physical features?	No	
3.	Result in the loss of availability of a known mineral resource or locally important mineral resource recovery site, that would be of value to the region and the residents of the state.	No	
4.	Result in unstable earth surfaces or increase the exposure of people or property to geologic or seismic hazards?	No	
5.	Result in or be affected by soil erosion or siltation (whether by water or wind)?	Yes*	No
6.	Result in the increased use of fuel or energy in large amounts or in a wasteful manner?	No	
7.	Result in an increase in the rate of use of any natural resource?	No	
8.	Result in the substantial depletion of any nonrenewable resource?	No	

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<sup>1</sup> The Valencia Company is located at 23823 Valencia Boulevard, Valencia, California. For an appointment to review the Technical Reports, contact Jerry Domke during normal business hours at 661-255-4213.

<b>PHYSICAL</b> - Will the proposal either directly or indirectly:		<b>Yes or No?</b>	<b>If yes, is it significant?</b> <b>Yes or No?</b>
9.	Violate any published federal, state, or local standards pertaining to hazardous waste, solid waste, or litter control?	Yes*	No
10.	Modify the channel of a river or stream, or the bed of the ocean, or any inlet or lake?	No*	
11.	Encroach upon a floodplain or result in or be affected by floodwaters or tidal waves?	No*	
12.	Adversely affect the quantity or quality of surface water, groundwater, or public water supply?	No*	
13.	Result in the use of water in large amounts or in a wasteful manner?	No	
14.	Affect wetlands or riparian vegetation?	No	
15.	Violate or be inconsistent with federal, state, or local water quality standards?	No*	
16.	Result in changes in air movement, moisture, or temperature, or any climatic conditions?	No	
17.	Result in an increase in air pollutant emissions, adverse effects on or deterioration of ambient air quality?	Yes*	No
18.	Result in the creation of objectionable odors?	No	
19.	Violate or be inconsistent with federal, state, or local air standards or control plans?	No*	
20.	Result in an increase in noise levels or vibration for adjoining areas?	No*	
21.	Result in any federal, state, or local noise criteria being equaled or exceeded?	No*	
22.	Produce new light, glare, or shadows?	No	

<b>BIOLOGICAL</b> -- Will the proposal result in (either directly or indirectly):		<b>Yes or No?</b>	<b>If yes, is it significant?</b> <b>Yes or No?</b>
23.	Change in the diversity of species, or number of any species of plants (including trees, shrubs, grass, microflora, and aquatic plants)?	No*	
24.	Reduction of the numbers of or encroachment upon the critical habitat of any unique threatened or endangered species of plants?	No*	
25.	Introduction of new species of plants into an area, or result in a barrier to the normal replenishment of existing species?	No*	
26.	Reduction in acreage of any agricultural crop or commercial timber stand, or affect prime, unique, or other farmland of state or local importance?	Yes*	No
27.	Removal or deterioration of existing fish or wildlife habitat?	No*	
28.	Change in the diversity of species, or numbers of any species of animals (birds, land animals including reptiles, fish and shellfish, benthic organisms, insects, or microfauna)?	No*	

<b>BIOLOGICAL -- Will the proposal result in (either directly or indirectly):</b>		<b>Yes or No?</b>	<b>If yes, is it significant? Yes or No?</b>
29.	Reduction of the numbers of or encroachment upon the critical habitat of any unique threatened or endangered species of animals?	No*	
30.	Conflict with any applicable habitat conservation plan, natural community conservation plan, or other approved local, regional, or state habitat plan?	No*	
31.	Introduction of new species of animals into an area, or result in a barrier to the migration or movement of animals?	No*	

<b>SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC -- Will the proposal directly or indirectly:</b>		<b>Yes or No?</b>	<b>If yes, is it significant? Yes or No?</b>
32.	Cause disruption of orderly planned development?	No	
33.	Be inconsistent with any elements of adopted community plans, policies, or goals?	No	
34.	Be inconsistent with a Coastal Zone Management Plan?	No	
35.	Affect the location, distribution, density, or growth rate of the human population of an area?	No	
36.	Affect lifestyles, or neighborhood character or stability?	No	
37.	Affect minority, elderly, handicapped, transit-dependent, or other specific interest groups?	No	
38.	Divide or disrupt an established community?	No	
39.	Affect existing housing, require the acquisition of residential improvements or the displacement of people, or create a demand for additional housing?	No	
40.	Affect employment, industry, or commerce, or require the displacement of businesses or farms?	Yes*	No
41.	Affect property values or the local tax base?	No	
42.	Affect any community facilities (including medical, educational, scientific, recreational, or religious institutions, ceremonial sites, or sacred shrines)?	No	
43.	Affect public utilities, or police, fire, emergency, or other public services?	Yes*	No
44.	Have substantial impact on existing transportation systems or alter present patterns of circulation or movement of people and/or goods?	Yes*	No (Build Alts.) Yes (No-Build Alt.)
45.	Generate additional traffic?	No*	
46.	Affect or be affected by existing parking facilities or result in demand for new parking?	No	
47.	Expose people or structures to a significant risk of loss, injury, or death involving wildland fires, including where wildlands are adjacent to urbanized areas or where residences are intermixes with wildlands.	No	

<b>SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC -- Will the proposal directly or indirectly:</b>		<b>Yes or No?</b>	<b>If yes, is it significant? Yes or No?</b>
48.	Involve a substantial risk of an explosion or the release of hazardous substances in the event of an accident or otherwise adversely affect overall public safety?	No*	
49.	Result in alterations to waterborne, rail, or air traffic?	No	
50.	Support large commercial or residential development?	Yes*	No
51.	Affect a substantial archaeological or historic site, structure, object, or building?	No*	
52.	Affect wild or scenic rivers, or natural landmarks?	No	
53.	Affect any scenic resources or result in the obstruction of any scenic vista or view open to the public, or creation of an aesthetically offensive site open to public view?	No*	
54.	Result in substantial impacts associated with construction activities (e.g., noise, dust, temporary drainage, traffic detours and temporary access, etc.)?	No	
55.	Result in the use of any publicly-owned land from a park, recreation area, or wildlife and waterfowl refuge?	No	

<b>MANDATORY FINDINGS OF SIGNIFICANCE</b>		<b>Yes or No?</b>
56.	Does the project have the potential to substantially degrade the quality of the environment, substantially reduce the habitat of a fish or wildlife species, cause a fish or wildlife population to drop below self-sustaining levels, threaten to eliminate a plant or animal community, reduce the number or restrict the range of a rare or endangered plant or animal, or eliminate important examples of the major periods of California history or prehistory?	No
57.	Does the project have the potential to achieve short-term, to the disadvantage of long-term, environmental goals? (A short-term impact on the environment is one that occurs in a relatively brief, definitive period of time while long-term impacts will endure well into the future.)	No
58.	Does the project have environmental effects that are individually limited, but cumulatively considerable? Cumulatively considerable means that the incremental effects of an individual project are considerable when viewed in connection with the effects of past projects, the effects of other current projects, and the effects of probable future projects. It includes the effects of other projects that interact with this project and, together, are considerable.	No*
59.	Does the project have environmental effects that will cause substantial adverse effects on human beings, either directly or indirectly?	No

# 5 Discussion of Environmental Evaluation

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To address potential environmental impacts associated with the project, the Environmental Significance Checklist was used. In addition to preparation of the environmental checklist, the following technical studies were conducted as part of this IS/EA:

- Air Quality Study, Valencia Company, July 2000b
- Biological Survey, Bon Terra, April 2000a
- Historic Property Survey Report, Valencia Company, July 2000c
- Initial Site Assessment, Valencia Company, February 1999a

The following discussion addresses those areas of potential environmental impact associated with the project that have been identified by the checklist or technical studies, as well as a discussion of their potential significance. It also provides explanations of the responses in the Environmental Significance Checklist that are noted with an asterisk.

## 5.1 Siltation (Question 5)

### 5.1.1 Project Impacts

Construction of the proposed project would require grading of the immediate project area, which could result in erosion of disturbed earth by wind and/or water. This erosion could result in liquids and fine-grain particulate solids entering the Castaic Creek or Santa Clara River. This siltation would be expected to wash downstream to potentially contaminate aquatic habitat. Although no riparian habitat is located within the study area, indirect impacts to these riparian habitats and resident species downstream would be considered substantial. However, appropriate Best Management Practices (BMPs) and erosion control measures, [as discussed in Section 5.7, will](#) be implemented during construction; and siltation into the Santa Clara River and Castaic Creek would be both minimal and not considered substantial.

Additionally, the project applicant shall apply for coverage under the State Water Resources Control Board's General Permit for Storm Water Discharge Associated with Construction Activity and shall comply with all of the provisions of the permit, including the development of a Storm Water Pollution Prevention Plan (SWPPP), which includes provisions for the implementation of BMPs and erosion control measures.

### 5.1.2 Mitigation

No mitigation is necessary because there are no substantial impacts resulting from siltation. [BMP's addressing indirect siltation impacts to special-status wildlife species are discussed in Section 5.7.](#)

## 5.2 Hazardous Waste (Questions 9 and 48)

### 5.2.1 Project Impacts

As discussed in Section 3.11, an ISA was conducted for the proposed project (Valencia Company, 1999a). This report concluded that the following recognized environmental conditions were identified at the subject parcel:

- Potential groundwater contamination from past agricultural land use at the site and leaking USTs and a landfill at nearby properties
- Potential for residual concentration of pesticides/herbicides in soil resulting from routine applications associated with past agricultural land use at the subject parcel

Approximately 0.5 hectare (1.3 acres) of potentially contaminated land would be required for the Build Alternative, with no additional right-of-way required for the No-Build Alternative. Because no recognized environmental concerns were observed during a May 1998 site visit, these potential environmental conditions are not considered adverse impacts. As a result, the proposed project is not expected to result in a risk of the release of hazardous substances during the construction and operation of the proposed project and would not endanger the safety of workers or the general public. Additionally, neither the presence of these conditions nor the construction or operation of the proposed project are anticipated to violate any published federal, state, or local standards pertaining to hazardous waste, solid waste, or litter control.

Recent aerially deposited lead testing determined that lead levels in the soil are not significant. As a result, any soil removed during construction would be able to be used as fill for other areas of the project and would not require landfilling or placement at a hazardous materials site. These tests were completed prior to the purchase or exchange of right-of-way to the State of California, who is prohibited from purchasing or receiving land on which contaminants are located.

Construction of the proposed project would result in the generation of concrete and asphalt debris and rebar; however, the majority of these materials would be reused in the construction of the proposed project and would not result in a significant project impact. Food wrappers, miscellaneous trash, and septic waste from the construction contractor employees would be generated during the construction phase of the project. Chemical toilets would be used for septic waste; however, the project would generate solid waste only during the short-term construction period, so only minimal impacts would be expected. In the long term, no solid waste would be generated by any of the alternatives for the I-5/SR-126 Interchange Project. As a result, the project would result in less-than-substantial impacts to solid waste management.

The proposed project would require the removal of existing traffic stripes and pavement markings using either yellow thermoplastic strips or paint. These materials have the potential to contain hazardous levels of lead and/or chromium which would be dangerous to both the environment and human health. These materials are typically removed using sand or air blasting equipment. Workers are required to adhere to OSHA standards, which includes wearing protective clothing. After blasting, the blasted material is collected and

~~disposed of at an appropriate hazardous materials facility. Recent aerially deposited lead testing determined that lead levels in the soil are not significant. As a result, any soil removed during construction would be able to be used as fill for other areas of the project and would not require landfilling or placement at a hazardous materials site. These tests were completed prior to the purchase or exchange of right of way to the State of California, who is prohibited from purchasing or receiving land on which contaminants are located.~~

~~Construction of the proposed project would result in the generation of concrete and asphalt debris and rebar; however, the majority of these materials would be reused in the construction of the proposed project and would not result in a significant project impact. Food wrappers, miscellaneous trash, and septic waste from the construction contractor employees would be generated during the construction phase of the project. Chemical toilets would be used for septic waste; however, the project would generate solid waste only during the short term construction period, so only minimal impacts would be expected. In the long term, no solid waste would be generated by any of the alternatives for the I-5/SR-126 Interchange Project. As a result, the project would result in less than substantial impacts to solid waste management.~~

~~The proposed project would require the removal of existing traffic stripes and pavement markings using either yellow thermoplastic strips or paint. These materials have the potential to contain hazardous levels of lead and/or chromium which would be dangerous to both the environment and human health. These materials are typically removed using sand or air blasting equipment. Workers are required to adhere to OSHA standards, which includes wearing protective clothing. After blasting, the blasted material is collected and disposed of at an appropriate hazardous materials facility.~~

## 5.2.2 Mitigation

Although no substantial potential for or evidence of hazardous material contamination was observed or detected while conducting the ISA, the following mitigation measures are recommended to further minimize this potential during construction activities:

- During construction, waste material would be classified and recycled or reused, as appropriate.
- If a previously undetected hazardous waste site/location is unearthed during construction, all excavation activities in the immediate vicinity of the contaminated site would be suspended. Caltrans, in conjunction with other appropriate agencies, would develop a plan to investigate the site of contamination and to determine what corrective measures, if any, may be required to safeguard public health and the environment. Waste material removed from the construction area would be disposed of in accordance with current standards specified in Title 22 of the California Code of Regulations (22 CCR).
- There is the potential for minor groundwater and soil contamination due to nearby leaking USTs, a solid waste landfill, and past agricultural activities. It is believed that the proposed project would not require excavation that would impact the groundwater level. A Site Investigation (SI) to verify the presence and extent of the hazardous waste within the project area would be conducted during the design stage, after roadway

geometric plans have been approved, so that design and right-of-way issues can be identified and resolved at an early stage. If contamination is identified, the district would consider alternatives (including design variations) to avoid the hazardous waste area. If the site cannot be avoided, remediation of the contaminated site should be considered prior to construction because the State of California cannot purchase or be given property containing contaminated materials.

## 5.3 Water Resources (Questions 10, 12, and 15)

### 5.3.1 Project Impacts

This section assesses impacts that the proposed project would have on nearby water resources, including impacts from stormwater runoff and erosion during construction. [A discussion of indirect water quality impacts to aquatic species can be found in Section 5.7.](#)

**Stormwater Runoff.** There would be a slight increase in the amount of stormwater runoff on the project site due to an increased amount of impervious surfaces. As a result, there would be a small increase in runoff to the Santa Clara River, which could potentially degrade surface water quality. However, adherence to standard construction methods and BMPs would minimize adverse environmental effects to the Santa Clara River, would prevent the proposed project from substantially affecting water quality, would ensure project consistency with state and federal water quality standards, [and would ensure that water quality impacts to aquatic species are avoided.](#)

The total monthly runoff to the river was estimated as the net new impervious surface area of the interchange (2.3 hectares [3.0 acres] for Alternative C) multiplied by the monthly precipitation totals at the National Weather Service station at Newhall (NWS, 1999). Those monthly totals were compared to the average monthly total hydraulic load of the river (using the data shown in Figure 2). For all months except November, the average precipitation was less than 1 percent of the river flow. In November, project-associated stormwater runoff may average up to 2 percent of the river flow. In reality, stormwater BMPs designed to absorb and infiltrate stormwater runoff would mitigate for almost all stormwater runoff from the site. No adverse impacts to the Santa Clara River are expected from this small amount of project-associated runoff.

These BMPs would be described in detail as part of the SWPPP filed as part of the Stormwater National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) permitting for the project.

**Erosion During Construction.** Standard construction practices and adherence to the project SWPPP filed as part of the Construction NPDES permit would protect the Santa Clara River and prevent substantial impacts related to erosion during construction. Construction management BMPs are designed to minimize erosion and stop downstream siltation during construction activities. Standard BMPs (e.g., Caltrans, 1992) would include, but are not limited to:

- The establishment of equipment staging areas and the isolation of hazardous materials from drainage to the streambed

- The control of construction vehicles and containment of any leakage; a ban on equipment maintenance within the streambed
- The prohibition of all construction debris within the river channel
- Sediment traps and/or straw bale filters and silt fences
- Temporary and permanent revegetation of exposed soil with native plant material

Implementation of BMPs would minimize erosion during construction and would prevent the proposed project from substantially affecting water quality, and would ensure that water quality impacts to aquatic species are avoided.

### 5.3.2 Mitigation

Since there are no adverse impacts to water quality resulting from the proposed project, no mitigation measures are necessary. All potential impacts to water quality and flooding would be minimized or prevented during construction by the implementation of and adherence to BMPs. BMP's addressing indirect water quality impacts to special-status wildlife species are discussed in Section 5.7.

The project would require both Construction and Operations Stormwater NPDES permits, as well as consultation with state and federal agencies concerning protection measures for the listed aquatic species in the project vicinity.

## 5.4 Floodplain (Question 11)

### 5.4.1 Project Impacts

As discussed in the Floodplain Evaluation Report (Valencia Company, 2000a) and shown in Figure 10, the proposed project is not located within either the base 100-year floodplain or Capitol Floodplain for either the Santa Clara River or Castaic Creek. Additionally, there are no impacts to natural and beneficial floodplain values; and the proposed project would not support incompatible floodplain development. The proposed project is consistent with existing watershed and floodplain management programs.

### 5.4.2 Mitigation

No mitigation is necessary because there are no impacts to the Santa Clara River or Castaic Creek floodplains.

## 5.5 Air Quality (Questions 17 and 19)

### 5.5.1 Project Impacts

**Construction Impacts.** Emissions from the proposed project would impact air quality during construction. Equipment would be used during site preparation and project construction for activities such as clearing, grading, excavating, loading/unloading of trucks, and travel on unpaved roads. These activities would generate emissions of fugitive dust and impact local air quality.

In addition to the fugitive dust, the exhaust emissions from the operation of heavy equipment would also contain criteria pollutants such as PM<sub>10</sub>, NO<sub>x</sub>, and ROC. NO<sub>x</sub> and ROC are important because they react to form ozone in the presence of sunlight. The vehicles of commuting workers and other equipment powered by internal combustion engines would also generate emissions of criteria pollutants and could impact air quality at or near the construction site. Impacts due to equipment emissions and fugitive dust would be considered substantial without the implementation of BMPs, discussed below.

**Operational Impacts.** A transportation project can affect regional air quality if emissions of ozone precursors (NO<sub>x</sub> and ROC) from traffic are greater with the project than without the project. In order to be found in conformance with the Federal Clean Air Act Amendments (CAAA) of 1990, a project must come from approved transportation plans and programs such as the RTP and the RTIP. The CAAAs of 1990 require that transportation plans, programs, and projects that are funded by or approved under Title 23 United States Code (U.S.C.) or Federal Transit Act (FTA) conform to state or federal air quality plans. The proposed project is identified in the 2000/01 – 2005/06 RTIP, which was approved by the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) (FHWA/FTA) on October 6, 2000. Interchange improvements/reconfigurations projects of this type are identified in the EPA Conformity Rule category of exempt projects that are exempt from the requirement that a regional emissions analysis be made.

The pollutant of primary concern when assessing localized impacts of transportation projects is CO. High CO concentrations tend to accumulate near areas of heavy traffic congestion where average vehicle speeds are low. Localized impacts are assessed by estimating maximum ambient CO concentrations near the roadways affected by the project. The concentrations are compared to the national and California ambient air quality standards for CO. The impact of a project is considered to be adverse if the project creates a new CO violation or exacerbates an existing violation.

In general, the proposed project would improve traffic flow and increase average vehicle speeds through the interchange relative to the no-project condition; therefore, the project is generally expected to have a beneficial impact on localized air quality. However, the location of the proposed intersection at the southbound I-5 off-ramp with SR-126 (Alternative C) would potentially move traffic closer to a receptor site. For this reason, a CO screening analysis was performed to determine if this intersection would cause localized violations of the standards for CO. Localized CO impacts were evaluated using the Transportation Project-Level Carbon Monoxide Protocol written by the Institute of Traffic Studies at the University of California, Davis, 1997. In order to use the screening procedure, the following assumptions were made: the project would have less than 50 percent vehicles in cold start mode, the percentage of heavy-duty gas trucks would be less than 1.2 percent, traffic volumes would be less than 1,000 vehicles per hour per lane, and the January mean minimum temperature would be greater than 35 degrees Fahrenheit (° F). SCAG endorses the use of the protocol to assess project-level impacts.

Table 7 presents the peak 1-hour and 8-hour CO concentrations predicted near the modeled intersection under build-out conditions (2020) (refer to the separate Air Quality Analysis Report for a more detailed analysis). The analysis shows that the maximum 1-hour CO concentration would be 14.8 ppm, which is well below the national standard of 35 ppm and

the state standard of 20 ppm. The maximum 8-hour concentration is 8.6 ppm, which is below the national and state standard of 9 ppm.

**TABLE 7**  
Maximum CO Concentrations with the Proposed Project (2020)

Intersection	Maximum 1-hour CO Concentration (ppm)	Maximum 8-Hour CO Concentration (ppm)
SB I-5 off-ramp / SR-126	14.8	8.6

Source: Valencia Company, 2000b.

Notes:

Concentrations include a 1-hour background concentration of 6.9 ppm and an 8-hour background concentration of 3.1 ppm.

The National Ambient Air Quality Standards for CO are 35 ppm (1-hour) and 9 ppm (8-hour).

The California Ambient Air Quality Standards for CO are 20 ppm (1-hour) and 9 ppm (8-hour).

Because the proposed project would not lead to, contribute to, or cause a violation of the CO or PM<sub>10</sub> standards, localized project impacts would not be consequential. Furthermore, the proposed project would not increase the frequency or severity of any existing CO or PM<sub>10</sub> violations; therefore, the project-level conformity requirements are satisfied.

Projects are subject to conformity requirements for PM<sub>10</sub> if they are located in a PM<sub>10</sub> nonattainment or maintenance area (Federal standards). At the regional scale, the proposed project is identified in the 2000/01 – 2005/06 RTIP. The RTIP air quality analysis must show that the transportation system would not increase PM<sub>10</sub> emissions overall; therefore, inclusion of this project in a conforming RTIP would show that the project would not cause a significant regional PM<sub>10</sub> impact.

At the local scale, a qualitative PM<sub>10</sub> hot-spot analysis is required for this project since the proposed site is located in a Federal nonattainment zone for PM<sub>10</sub>. No violations of the PM<sub>10</sub> National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS) have been recorded at the Santa Clarita Station, the nearest representative monitoring station for this project, for years 1994 to 1996. For example, ARB's 1997 data show a maximum 24-hour concentration of 91 µg/m<sup>3</sup>, approximately 60 percent of the federal standard. Because the concentrations are well below the standard and no unusual circumstances are expected (i.e., heavy wintertime sanding conditions or a high concentration of diesel trucks), this project would be unlikely to contribute to a violation of the PM<sub>10</sub> NAAQS.

**Cumulative Air Quality Impacts.** The proposed project is planned to accommodate the traffic demand associated with future development of the project area. The cumulative regional air quality impacts associated with the future development, including traffic generation, are addressed in the following environmental documents:

- Valencia Commerce Center Final Environmental Impact Report (Sikand, 1990)
- Newhall Ranch Road Preliminary Environmental Evaluation Report (Valencia Company, 1998)

The proposed I-5/SR-126 improvement project would not generate any additional traffic; therefore, the contribution of the project to cumulative regional air quality impacts would not be consequential.

The screening analysis for localized CO impacts included traffic volumes projected by Austin-Foust Associates for the year 2020. These traffic projections were derived from the Santa Clarita Valley Consolidated Traffic Model using future land use and travel patterns that account for the cumulative projected growth of the project area. As stated above, localized impacts would be less than the ambient air quality standards; therefore, it is concluded that localized cumulative impacts would not be consequential.

### 5.5.2 Mitigation

**Construction Mitigation.** Impacts due to the generation of fugitive dust and presence of other criteria pollutants would be less than substantial; however, the following measures are generally accepted construction management practices used to mitigate the air quality impacts of a project.

#### 1. Fugitive Dust Control

- a. Apply EPA-approved nontoxic chemical soil stabilizers to all inactive construction areas (i.e., previously graded areas inactive for 5 days or more)
- b. Water active grading and parking areas at least twice daily during dry season (May 1 through November 1)
- c. Enclose, cover, water twice daily, or apply approved soil binders to exposed stockpiles
- d. Suspend all excavation and grading operations when instantaneous wind speeds reach 40.2 km per hour (25 miles per hour)
- e. Cover or maintain at least 0.6 m (2 feet) of freeboard on all trucks hauling dirt, sand, silt, or other loose materials
- f. Sweep paved streets at the end of the day if visible soil material is carried over to adjacent paved roads
- g. Install wheel washers where vehicles enter and exit unpaved roads onto paved roads, or wash off mud from trucks leaving the site

#### 2. Vehicular Emissions Controls

- a. Maintain equipment and vehicle engines in good condition and in proper tune as per manufacturer's specifications and per SCAQMD rules
- b. Use electricity from existing nearby power lines rather than from temporary diesel- or gasoline-powered generators, to the extent feasible
- c. Provide temporary traffic control during all phases of construction activities that affect circulation on public roads to maintain traffic flow

- d. Schedule construction activities that affect traffic flow on the arterial system to off-peak hours

**Operational Mitigation.** Because the proposed project would not contribute to a violation of the CO standards and would have inconsequential, localized project effects, and because the project-level conformity requirements are satisfied, no mitigation for operational impacts is necessary.

**Cumulative Mitigation.** The contribution of the project to cumulative regional air quality impacts would be inconsequential. As a result, no mitigation measures for cumulative air quality impacts are necessary.

## 5.6 Noise (Questions 20 and 21)

### 5.6.1 Project Impacts

As discussed in Section 3.13, a screening procedure for noise impacts indicated that there are no existing or planned noise-sensitive receivers located within the vicinity of the proposed project. As a result, no noise impacts would result from the proposed interchange improvements. [A discussion of potential indirect noise impacts to special-status species can be found in Section 5.7.](#)

### 5.6.2 Mitigation

No mitigation is necessary because there are no substantial noise impacts. [BMP's addressing indirect noise impacts to special-status wildlife species are discussed in Section 5.7.](#)

## 5.7 Biological Resources (Questions 23 to 25 and 27 to 31)

### 5.7.1 Project Impacts

[Impacts Documented in Original Biological Survey Report and Subsequent Focused Surveys.](#)

The existing mixed sage scrub east of I-5 within the project right-of-way was to be removed when the City of Santa Clarita graded Newhall Ranch Road from Stanford Avenue east to Vanderbilt Way. Because this construction occurred prior to the construction of the proposed project, no impacts to the slender mariposa lily and Plummer's mariposa lily are anticipated as a result of implementation of this proposed project. An Environmentally Sensitive Area would be employed to ensure that construction activities do not occur outside of project limits.

[A focused survey was conducted to determine the presence or absence of special-status plant species within the I-5/SR-126 interchange study area \(Bon Terra, 2000b\). Field surveys located a single individual of the club-haired mariposa lily within the study area. However, as mentioned above, the site was graded as part of the construction for the Newhall Ranch Road extension; and the plant was removed. No other special-status species were observed during the focused survey. The focused survey recommended that because the only club-](#)

~~club-haired mariposa lily plant observed was removed, the proposed project, therefore, would not impact this species; and no mitigation would be warranted. However, Environmentally Sensitive Areas would be employed to ensure that construction activities do not occur outside the project limits. A focused survey was conducted to determine the presence or absence of special-status plant species within the I-5/SR 126 interchange study area (Bon Terra, 2000b). Field surveys located a single individual of the club-haired mariposa lily within the study area. However, as mentioned above, the site was graded as part of the construction for the Newhall Ranch Road extension; and the plant was removed. No other special-status species were observed during the focused survey. The focused survey recommended that because the only club-haired mariposa lily plant observed was removed, the proposed project, therefore, would not impact this species; and no mitigation would be warranted. However, Environmentally Sensitive Areas would be employed to ensure that construction activities do not occur outside the project limits.~~

No special-status wildlife species are anticipated within the project area, and no raptor nests were identified during the September 1999 site survey. Consequently, no project impacts are anticipated, ~~including impacts to the unarmored threespine stickleback (*Gasterosteus aculeatus williamsoni*), least Bell's vireo (*Vireo bellii pusillus*), or southwestern willow flycatcher (*Empidonax traillii extimus*)~~including impacts to the unarmored threespine stickleback (*Gasterosteus aculeatus williamsoni*), least Bell's vireo (*Vireo bellii pusillus*), or southwestern willow flycatcher (*Empidonax traillii extimus*). However, it is important to note that the loss of any active nest on the site, including nests of both raptors and other migratory non-game birds, would be considered a substantial project impact. To avoid these potential impacts ~~and to comply with the Federal Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918 (50 CFR Section 10.13) and Sections 3503, 3503.3, and 3513 of the California Fish and Game Code~~and to comply with the Federal Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918 (50 CFR Section 10.13) and Sections 3503, 3503.3, and 3513 of the California Fish and Game Code, a qualified biologist would be required to survey within the limits of project disturbance for the presence of occupied nests 30 days prior to the onset of construction activities, ~~should potential habitat be affected outside the breeding season (i.e., March 1 to August 31). During the breeding season, a biological monitor should survey for active bird nests no sooner than 2 days prior to project-related disturbances to breeding bird habitat on and adjacent to the proposed project site~~should potential habitat be affected outside the breeding season (i.e., March 1 to August 31). During the breeding season, a biological monitor should survey for active bird nests no sooner than 2 days prior to project-related disturbances to breeding bird habitat on and adjacent to the proposed project site. Any occupied nests found during the survey would be protected until nesting activity has ended to ensure compliance with Section 3503.5 of the California Fish and Game Code. ~~Additionally, a minimum buffer would be provided, as determined by the biological monitor. Nesting activity for raptors in the region of the study area normally occurs from February~~ Additionally, a minimum buffer would be provided, as determined by the biological monitor. Nesting activity for raptors in the region of the study area normally occurs from February 1 to June 30.

### Impacts Documented in Response to U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Comments.

In response to U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service concerns (Appendix E, Comment Letter 13) regarding water quality and noise impacts to special-status species known or potentially

occurring within the Santa Clara River in the vicinity of the project site, a White Paper (BonTerra, 2001) was prepared to address these concerns. The paper (1) summarized the existing biological conditions on the project site; (2) ascertained the potential for special-status species that could be negatively affected by runoff or noise impacts; and (3) identified project mitigation measures that will be implemented to ensure that no direct or indirect impacts occur to listed species as a result of project implementation. The White Paper is attached as Appendix A, and major findings from the paper are summarized below.

There would be no direct or indirect impacts to special-status plant species. The only known special-status plant species to occur in the region are Nevin's barberry (*Berberis nevini*) and slender-horned spineflower (*Dodecahema leptoceras*). These species were not observed within the study area during focused surveys conducted within the study area in the spring of 2000. Therefore, these species would not be impacted by the proposed project.

The proposed project would not directly impact special-status aquatic species in the Santa Clara River, such as the unarmored threespine stickleback, the southern California steelhead, and the arroyo southwestern toad. The proposed project is located outside the Santa Clara River and construction limits are over 194 meters (635 feet) from the Santa Clara River at its closest point. In addition, the impact area of the proposed project does not represent suitable upland estivating habitat for the arroyo toad because of the urban nature of the impact area (i.e., existing freeway interchange) and the highly disturbed areas (i.e., active agricultural fields, roadway, and various commercial and industrial buildings and associated facilities) that exist between the proposed project and the Santa Clara River. Therefore, there would be no direct impact to these species' habitats.

Due to a slight increase in stormwater runoff and construction related activities generated by the proposed project, the water quality of the Santa Clara River may be affected, thereby indirectly impacting aquatic species. However, to ensure that water quality impacts to aquatic species are avoided, the following avoidance measures, approved by the USFWS for other projects with similar environmental baseline settings, shall be used:

- Erosion control measures incorporated into the final grading plans consistent with Caltrans' specifications shall include the following design features:
  - Placement of silt fencing, weed-free hay bales or straw wattles, sandbags, sediment catchment devices, or other methods designed to reduce velocities and erosion. These erosion control features will be placed at each inlet, along each toe of slope, or as appropriate in accordance with the plan.
  - Hydro seed exposed or bare areas with native plant species.
- Excavated materials shall be stockpiled with erosion protection to ensure that these materials do not enter the Santa Clara River.
- Maintenance and fueling of large construction equipment and machinery shall occur in areas that are designed to prevent spillages of fuels, lubricants, cleaners and other fluids.
- The project will include an infiltration basin to catch sediment and storm water runoff within the northwestern portion of the project. This BMP is intended to absorb and infiltrate stormwater runoff.

With the implementation of the above avoidance measures, there will be no indirect impacts to aquatic species.

Special-status bird species such as the southwestern willow flycatcher and least Bell's vireo have low and moderate potential for occurring in the project area. However, because the proposed project is located outside the Santa Clara River and no riparian vegetation will be removed as a result of the project, no direct impacts to these species are expected to occur.

As discussed in Section 5.6, no existing or planned noise-sensitive receivers are located within the vicinity of the proposed project. However, based on comments from the USFWS regarding the potential indirect noise impacts on listed wildlife species that are known or potentially occur within the Santa Clara River, an assessment of the highest noise levels that would be generated by the construction of the interchange improvements was conducted. This assessment was based on the methods presented in the U.S. Department of Transportation's (DOT's), Highway Construction Noise Measurement Prediction and Mitigation guidelines. A figure, included as Figure 2 of Appendix A, was also prepared to graphically portray the predicted noise environment resulting from the use of pile drivers for the construction of the Old Road bridge. The analysis indicates that the 60 dBA noise contour would extend approximately 168 meters (550 feet) into the Santa Clara River over areas containing riparian habitat. In consideration of the fact that the 60 dBA noise environment is shown to extend within the river, the following avoidance measure shall be implemented for the construction of the bridge facilities:

- No pile driving activities for I-5/SR-126 intersection and The Old Road/SR-126 intersection construction shall occur during the least Bell's vireo/southwestern willow flycatcher breeding season (April 1<sup>st</sup> and August 15<sup>th</sup>).

With the implementation of the above BMPs and avoidance measure, no indirect noise impacts to special-status species are expected to occur as a result of project implementation.

## 5.7.2 Mitigation

As discussed above, implementation of BMPs and avoidance measures would prevent indirect water quality and noise impacts to special-status species. In addition, Section 5.3 (Water Resources) discusses the implementation of BMPs that would include the temporary and permanent revegetation of exposed soil with native plant material to minimize soil erosion during construction that would also reduce the introduction of non-native plant species on the project site and adjacent areas. Establishment of Environmentally Sensitive Areas to avoid sensitive species and habitat outside the proposed project would ensure the protection of plants immediately outside the construction area by installing orange plastic snow fencing at the grading limits in the area where the plants were located. Pre-construction surveys for the San Diego black-trailed jackrabbit nest sites will also be performed to ensure that this Species of Special Concern is not impacted. If these surveys locate active nests or dens, construction activities will be scheduled to avoid disturbance until the young in the nests are fully independent. With the implementation of BMPs and avoidance measures, there will be no impacts to special-status species.

Additional mitigation would not be required unless construction activities occurred outside the project limits. If so, focused surveys would need to be conducted to determine the

presence or absence of the slender mariposa lily and Plummer's mariposa lily. If these species were not found, no mitigation would be required.

## 5.8 Agriculture (Question 26)

### 5.8.1 Project Impacts

Congress enacted the FPPA in 1981. It is intended to minimize the extent to which federal activities contribute to the conversion of agricultural land to nonagricultural uses. It also seeks to ensure that federal policies are administered in a manner that would be compatible with state, local, and private policies that protect farmland. The FPPA requires federal agencies to examine the impact of their programs before they approve any activity that would convert farmland.

To rate the relative impact of projects on sites subject to the FPPA, federal agencies fill out a Farmland Conversion Impact Rating Form (Form AD-1006). The rating form is based on a Land Evaluation and Site Assessment (LESA) system, which is a numerical system that measures the quality of farmland. LESA systems have two components. The Land Evaluation element rates soil quality. The Site Assessment component measures other factors that affect the farm's viability including, but not limited to, proximity to water and sewer lines and the size of the parcel.

Sites receiving a combined score of less than 160 do not require further evaluation. Alternatives should be proposed for sites with a combined score greater than 160 points. On the basis of this analysis, a federal agency may, but is not required to, deny assistance to private parties and state and local governments undertaking projects that would convert farmland.

Active farmland is present west of I-5 between SR-126 and Henry Mayo Drive, and west of The Old Road within the area created by the SR-126 hook ramps. The property has been zoned by Los Angeles County as Urban 4 (with 15.0 to 40.0 dwelling units per acre). Construction of the proposed project would not require expansion of right-of-way into actively farmed land; however, there would be construction within land that, although not actively farmed, has been rated as prime farmland and farmland of statewide importance by the U.S. Department of Conservation, Natural Resource Conservation Service (formerly Soil Conservation Service). The proposed project rated a combined score of 103 on the Farmland Conversion Impact Rating Form. Because this score is well below the threshold of 160, the acquisition of this farmland would not be considered a significant project impact. Additionally, according to the FPPA, farmland does not include those lands that a state or local government has designated, by planning or zoning, for commercial, industrial, or residential use. As such, the acquisition of this land would not be a significant project impact.

### 5.8.2 Mitigation

No mitigation is necessary because there are no substantial impacts to farmland.

## 5.9 Employment, Industry, and Commerce (Question 40)

### 5.9.1 Project Impacts

The proposed project would not result in adverse impacts to local or regional employment, industry, or commerce, or require the displacement of businesses. Rather, it would have a positive effect for local and regional businesses, which would benefit from improved traffic operations at the I-5/SR-126 interchange. The proposed interchange would also accommodate planned growth within Valencia Commerce Center.

The removal of the existing SR-126 on- and off-ramps west of the I-5/SR-126 interchange would provide additional land that could be sold and either farmed or developed. Sale of this excess land would remove the land from the nontaxable, State of California property lists, and would generate a small amount of additional taxes for Los Angeles County.

### 5.9.2 Mitigation

No mitigation is necessary because there are no substantial, adverse impacts to business, employment, industry, or commerce.

## 5.10 Public Services (Question 43)

### 5.10.1 Project Impacts

Implementation of the proposed project would not result in the need to relocate any existing utilities. Additionally, no emergency facilities (police, fire, or hospitals) would be directly affected. However, emergency services could experience temporary, short-term traffic delays during construction. Any road closures and detours would be advertised in advance and signed to minimize adverse impacts to both the traveling public and emergency service operators. Additionally, Caltrans would coordinate their efforts with local authorities during construction to facilitate the transition. This impact would not be considered substantial due to the temporary, short-term nature of the impact. Additionally, Fire Station 76, located at 27223 Henry Mayo Drive west of the SR-126 on- and off-ramps, would be affected by the proposed project. The Fire Station would lose access to SR-126 via the hook ramps. However, Captain Miller of Fire Station 76 stated that as long as access to SR-126 was maintained via Commerce Center Drive, the loss of the hook ramps would "...not result in drastic impact" (County of Los Angeles Fire Department, 2001). As a result, the removal of the hook ramps would be less-than-significant.

Construction of the proposed project would have minor impacts on bus service provided by Santa Clarita Transit. Routes 1 and 2, which use the I-5/SR-126 interchange, would experience slight delays resulting from construction delays. Removal of the existing SR-126 hook ramps and construction on Henry Mayo Drive would not affect bus routes. After construction is completed, operation of the proposed project would result in improved access and route times. Implementation of the No-Build Alternative would result in slight delays for buses by 2020. This impact would not be substantial. Additionally, Caltrans would coordinate their efforts with local authorities during construction to facilitate the transition. This impact would not be considered substantial due to the temporary, short-term nature of

~~the impact. Additionally, Fire Station 76, located at 27223 Henry Mayo Drive west of the SR-126 on- and off-ramps, would be affected by the proposed project. The Fire Station would lose access to SR-126 via the hook ramps. However, Captain Miller of Fire Station 76 stated that as long as access to SR-126 was maintained via Commerce Center Drive, the loss of the hook ramps would "...not result in drastic impact" (County of Los Angeles Fire Department, 2001). As a result, the removal of the hook ramps would be less than significant.~~

~~Construction of the proposed project would have minor impacts on bus service provided by Santa Clarita Transit. Routes 1 and 2, which use the I-5/SR-126 interchange, would experience slight delays resulting from construction delays. Removal of the existing SR-126 hook ramps and construction on Henry Mayo Drive would not affect bus routes. After construction is completed, operation of the proposed project would result in improved access and route times. Implementation of the No-Build Alternative would result in slight delays for buses by 2020. This impact would not be substantial.~~

### 5.10.2 Mitigation

No mitigation is necessary because there are no substantial impacts to public services or facilities.

## 5.11 Transportation System (Questions 44 and 45)

### 5.11.1 Project Impacts

**Assessment of the No-Build Alternative.** The population of the Santa Clarita Valley is expected to grow to approximately 500,000 people by 2020. The area would experience a substantial increase in traffic from both regional and inter-regional growth, as well as build-out of local developments. The Valencia Company has developed residential and commercial properties along the I-5 corridor and near SR-126 during recent years, with additional development activities planned in the future.

The Commerce Center Area, a major commercial/industrial development located north of SR-126 at Commerce Center Drive (Figure 12), is forecasted to grow from approximately 200,000 square meters (m<sup>2</sup>) (49.4 acres) today to approximately 1.2 million m<sup>2</sup> by the year 2020. This would add approximately 110,000 trips per day, a majority of which would be served by SR-126 and the I-5/SR-126 interchange.

The Newhall Ranch area project located southwest of the SR-126/Commerce Center Drive intersection proposes the construction of approximately 23,000 dwelling units and over 530,000 m<sup>2</sup> (130.9 acres) designated for commercial and industrial use. These additional developments would add approximately 380,000 trips per day, with many of those using SR-126 and the I-5/SR-126 interchange.

The proposed developments within the Santa Clarita Valley would generate additional traffic on I-5 and SR-126. All the developments combined are expected to add approximately 930,000 trips per day to the area.

By the year 2020, the projected traffic within the study area would increase greatly. The year 2020 No-Build forecasted traffic volumes are shown in Figure 13. Traffic on SR-126 in the

p.m. peak hour would increase from 1,500 vehicles to 4,300 vehicles. On westbound Newhall Ranch Road, the traffic volume would increase from 500 to 3,000 vehicles. In general, the volume on the roadway network within the study area would more than triple over the next 20 years.

The increase in traffic at the I-5/SR-126 interchange would result in a LOS F at the SR-126 intersections with the northbound off-ramp and Commerce Center Drive. The LOS for the intersections serving the interchange was derived using peak-hour intersection capacity utilization (ICU) values. The ICU values range between 1.42 and 1.79, which indicates that the existing intersections on SR-126 cannot accommodate the forecasted growth. In addition, the forecasted peak-hour directional volumes on SR-126 between Commerce Center Drive and I-5 are in excess of 4,000 vehicles, which exceeds the capacity of the existing 2 lanes. Therefore, the existing roadway network cannot accommodate the build-out of the planned development based upon the forecasted traffic volumes. Because the No-Build Alternative cannot accommodate the forecasted growth in traffic and the existing roadway between Commerce Center Drive and I-5 cannot accommodate forecasted traffic volumes, implementation of the No-Build Alternative would result in substantial project impacts.

**Assessment of the Build Alternatives.** The Build Alternatives add missing movements and necessary capacity to the I-5/SR-126 interchange, and reduce out-of-direction traffic on The Old Road. Table 8 shows the LOS for each condition at the two future signalized intersections based upon the ICU analysis.

TABLE 8  
LOS Summary

Location	Existing				2020 No-Build				2020 Proposed Project			
	A.M.	LOS	P.M.	LOS	A.M.	LOS	P.M.	LOS	A.M.	LOS	P.M.	LOS
I-5 Northbound Ramps & SR-126	0.45	A	0.39	A	1.42	F	1.79	F	0.74	C	0.80	C
I-5 Southbound Ramps & SR-126	--		--						0.83	D	0.84	D

Source: Austin-Foust, 1998.

SR-126 would be widened to four lanes in each direction, with auxiliary lanes as needed, to accommodate the increase in traffic. The 2020 peak-hour volumes for Alternative C would be 4,300 vehicles in the eastbound direction and 3,800 vehicles in the westbound direction. See Figure 13 for the 2020 build alternative (Alternative C) proposed peak-hour traffic volumes and lane configurations.

The proposed improvements would add the necessary capacity to accommodate the future build-out within the area. A comparison of the operational analysis of the build and no-build alternatives indicates that the proposed improvements would eliminate several of the potential operational and safety problems identified in the LOS analysis of the no-build alternative.

In summary, the proposed I-5/SR-126 interchange improvements and the widening of SR-126 would result in the following beneficial traffic and circulation effects:

- Provide a full-service interchange that meets FHWA and Caltrans standards
- Increase the capacity along SR-126
- Eliminate existing weaving conflicts
- Improve intersection LOS
- Enhance safety

—The construction of the new interchange ramps and the elimination of the SR-126 hook ramps would result in some changes in local circulation and access, including less-than-significant impacts to Fire Station 76, located on Henry Mayo Drive. (See discussion of impacts to the Fire Station in Section 5.10.) For the majority of these access changes, especially those accessing the commercial developments along Newhall Ranch Road east of I-5, the proposed improvements would result in a reduction of out-of-direction travel and commute time. Drivers accessing Henry Mayo Drive and The Old Road may experience an



INSERT FIGURE 12 – Land Use Summary Areas

**INSERT FIGURE 13 – Proposed Project Peak Hour Volumes and Lane Configurations**

increase in out-of-direction travel (0.8 km [0.5 mile]) and commute time (1 to 2 minutes). However, these impacts are not considered substantial; and, on a regional basis, there would be no additional traffic generated as a direct result of the project. In summary, the proposed I-5/SR-126 interchange improvements and the widening of SR-126 would result in the following beneficial traffic and circulation effects:

- Provide a full-service interchange that meets FHWA and Caltrans standards
- Increase the capacity along SR-126
- Eliminate existing weaving conflicts
- Improve intersection LOS
- Enhance safety

The construction of the new interchange ramps and the elimination of the SR-126 hook ramps would result in some changes in local circulation and access, including less than significant impacts to Fire Station 76, located on Henry Mayo Drive. (See discussion of impacts to the Fire Station in Section 5.10.) For the majority of these access changes, especially those accessing the commercial developments along Newhall Ranch Road east of I-5, the proposed improvements would result in a reduction of out-of-direction travel and commute time. Drivers accessing Henry Mayo Drive and The Old Road may experience an increase in out-of-direction travel (0.8 km [0.5 mile]) and commute time (1 to 2 minutes). However, these impacts are not considered substantial; and, on a regional basis, there would be no additional traffic generated as a direct result of the project.

### 5.11.2 Mitigation

No mitigation measures are necessary for the Build Alternatives because there are no substantial project impacts.

## 5.12 Commercial Development (Question 50)

### 5.12.1 Project Impacts

The proposed project would accommodate planned growth within Valencia Commerce Center, which includes commercial and industrial development; however, the project would not generate a demand for additional development or open up new, currently undeveloped areas for development. As a result, no project impacts are expected.

### 5.12.2 Mitigation

No mitigation measures are necessary because there are no substantial project impacts.

## 5.13 Archaeological and Historic Resources (Question 51)

### 5.13.1 Project Impacts

The HPSR (Valencia Company, 2000c), prepared to identify any impacts of the proposed project on archaeological or historical resources, indicates that no historic resources were

found in the project area, [and is included in this document as Appendix B.](#) During a field survey conducted by Greenwood & Associates on September 20, 1999, in which a pedestrian examination of the surface area was employed, no cultural resources were observed. However, because Caltrans' records indicate that an unrecorded, possibly prehistoric village site exists adjacent to the southwest quadrant of the APE, despite the lack of physical evidence it would be appropriate for Archaeological and Native American Monitors to be present during the excavation phase of the project.

To further confirm that no cultural resources are located within the proposed project area, the staff of the Native American Heritage Commission provided the names and addresses of Native American individuals and/or organizations who they suggested might be able to provide further information regarding cultural resources in the proposed project area. Their names are provided below:

Ti'At Society  
Cindi Alvitre  
(Gabrielino)

Jim Velasquez  
(Gabrielino)

Kern Valley Indian Community  
Ron Wermuth  
(Tubatulabal, Kawaiisu, Koso, Yokut)

Charles Cook  
(Chumash, Gabrielino, Yokut,  
Kitanemuk)

Paul (Valenzuela) Varela  
(Chumash, Tataviam, Kitanemuk,  
Tongva, Serrano)

Beverly Salazar Folkes  
(Chumash, Tataviam, Fernandeño)

Louise Jeffredo-Warden  
(Gabrielino, Luiseno)

Owl Clan  
Dr. Kote & Lin A-Lul'Koy Lotah  
(Chumash)

Gabrielino/Tongva Tribal Council  
Ernest P. Salas  
(Gabrielino/Tongva)

Samuel H. Dunlap  
(Gabrielino)

Island Gabrielino Group  
John Jeffredo  
(Gabrielino)

Melissa M. Para-Hernandez  
(Chumash, Yaqui)

Robert F. Dorme  
(Gabrielino/Tongva)

San Fernando Mission Indians  
Rudy Ortega  
(Gabrielino, Chumash, Tataviam, Yaqui)

Delia Dominguez  
(Yowlumne, Kitanemuk)

Julie Lynn Tumamait  
(Chumash)

Diane Garcia Napoleone  
(Chumash)

Patrick Tumamait  
(Chumash)

Dwayne Vigil  
(Chumash)

Mark Steven Vigil  
(Chumash)

Owl Clan  
Qun-tan Shup  
(Chumash)

Anwa Wilanii  
(Tataviam)

Art Alvitre  
(Gabrielino)

The organizations/individuals listed above were sent a letter notifying them of the proposed project and that they were being consulted to ensure that any areas of sacred or spiritual significance to Native American groups were considered during the planning process. To date, two individuals have responded. Neither individual had any concerns regarding the location of or “territory” in which the proposed project is located. However, one did request that a Native American Monitor be present during the excavation phase of the project.

### 5.13.2 Mitigation

No mitigation measures are necessary because there are no substantial project impacts. However, because Caltrans’ records indicate that an unrecorded, possibly prehistoric village site exists adjacent to the southwest quadrant of the APE, despite the lack of physical evidence it would be appropriate for Archaeological and Native American Monitors to be present during the excavation phase of the project in that area.

If, during project construction, cultural materials appear during construction, work would stop in the immediate area. Upon such discoveries, the Contractor shall immediately notify the Environmental Branch Chief, and the site would be protected until it can be evaluated by a qualified archaeologist. The Caltrans Archaeologist would consult with FHWA and the SHPO to formulate a mitigation plan, including avoidance alternatives to mitigate for cultural resource impacts. Work can only resume in that area with approval of the SHPO and the Caltrans Archaeologist.

## 5.14 Scenic Resources (Question 53)

### 5.14.1 Project Impacts

The proposed project would not substantially change the scenic environment within the project area. Construction of the project would necessitate grading of the area and would temporarily result in a disruption of the natural environment surrounding the I-5/SR-126 interchange. After construction of the project, the area would be revegetated, thereby minimizing the level of impact. The grading would not be considered a substantial project impact because the area is already being graded for other, nearby projects; because of the temporary nature of the disruption; and because of the low scenic value of the urban interchange. Additionally, the interchange would not obstruct the view of any scenic vista or create an aesthetically offensive site.

### 5.14.2 Mitigation

No mitigation is necessary because there would be no substantial impacts to the project area.

## 5.15 Cumulative Impacts (Question 58)

### ~~5.15 Cumulative Impacts (Question 58)~~

#### 5.15.1 Project Impacts

Cumulative impacts are defined as two or more individual effects which, when considered together, are considerable or which compound or increase other environmental impacts. The cumulative impact from several projects is the change in the environment that results from the incremental impact of the project when added together with closely related past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future projects. Cumulative impacts can result from individually minor but collectively significant projects taking place over a period of time.

The proposed project is one roadway improvement project of several along the I-5 corridor through the Santa Clarita Valley. (See Section 2.3 for a discussion of these projects.) In addition, several residential and commercial development projects are pending or approved in the vicinity of the project area.

Development of this project may contribute to cumulative impacts to the following environmental resource areas:

- Siltation
- Water Quality
- Agriculture
- Transportation and Circulation

The proposed project would have no impacts on Hazardous Waste; Floodplain; Air Quality; Noise; Employment, Industry, and Commerce; Public Services; Commercial Development; Archaeological and Historic Resources; or Scenic Resources. Therefore, the proposed project would not contribute to the cumulative regional impacts of these environmental resources, so they are not discussed further.

Additionally, while Biological Resources will not be directly impacted by the proposed project there would be minor indirect impacts. As discussed in Section 5.7, indirect water quality impacts resulting from a slight increase in stormwater runoff and construction related activities would be avoided through the use of avoidance measures. Indirect impacts to noise sensitive wildlife species would be avoided by prohibiting pile driving activities during the least Bell's vireo/southwestern willow flycatcher breeding season (April 1<sup>st</sup> and August 15<sup>th</sup>), as discussed in Section 5.7. With these avoidance measures there will be no indirect impacts to biological resources. Therefore, the proposed project would not contribute to the cumulative regional impacts of Biological Resources.

~~Cumulative impacts are defined as two or more individual effects which, when considered together, are considerable or which compound or increase other environmental impacts. The cumulative impact from several projects is the change in the environment that results~~

from the incremental impact of the project when added together with closely related past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future projects. Cumulative impacts can result from individually minor but collectively significant projects taking place over a period of time.

The proposed project is one roadway improvement project of several along the I-5 corridor through the Santa Clarita Valley. (See Section 2.3 for a discussion of these projects.) In addition, several residential and commercial development projects are pending or approved in the vicinity of the project area.

Development of this project may contribute to cumulative impacts to the environmental resource areas discussed below.

#### 5.15.1.1 Siltation (Question 5)

The proposed project would contribute to regional cumulative impacts from the following projects:

The proposed project would contribute to regional cumulative impacts from the following projects:

- Newhall Ranch Road Connection
- I-5/Hasley Canyon Road Interchange Project
- Newhall Ranch Road Connection
- I-5/Hasley Canyon Road Interchange Project
- I-5/Magic Mountain Parkway Interchange Project
- I-5/Rye Canyon Road Ramp Improvement Project
- I-5/Valencia Boulevard Interchange Improvements
- SR-126/Commerce Center Drive Interchange Improvement Project
- I-5/Rye Canyon Road Ramp Improvement Project
- I-5/Valencia Boulevard Interchange Improvements
- SR-126/Commerce Center Drive Interchange Improvement Project

Siltation impacts from the proposed I-5/SR-126 Interchange Project, as well as the project listed above, would be less than significant. Additionally, each of these projects stated that BMPs would be implemented and impacts fully mitigated. These projects would, nonetheless, contribute to regional, cumulative siltation impacts. However, the contribution of the I-5/SR-126 Interchange Project to regional cumulative impacts is not expected to be substantial.

Siltation impacts from the proposed I-5/SR-126 Interchange Project, as well as the above listed projects, would be less than significant. Additionally, each of these projects stated that BMPs would be implemented and impacts fully mitigated. These projects would, nonetheless, contribute to regional, cumulative siltation impacts. However, the contribution of the I-5/SR-126 Interchange Project to regional cumulative impacts is not expected to be substantial.

#### 5.15.1.2 Water Quality (Questions 10, 12, and 15)

The proposed project would contribute to regional cumulative impacts from the following projects:

~~The proposed project would contribute to regional cumulative impacts from the following projects:~~

- ~~• Newhall Ranch Road Connection~~
- ~~• I-5/Hasley Canyon Road Interchange Project~~
- ~~• SR-126/Commerce Center Drive Interchange Improvement Project~~

~~—Newhall Ranch Road Connection~~

~~—I-5/Hasley Canyon Road Interchange Project~~

~~—SR-126/Commerce Center Drive Interchange Improvement Project~~

~~Water quality impacts from the proposed I-5/SR-126 Interchange Project, as well as the projects listed above, would be less-than-significant. Additionally, each of these projects stated that BMPs will be implemented and impacts fully mitigated. These projects would, nonetheless, contribute to regional, cumulative water quality impacts. However, the contribution of the I-5/SR-126 Interchange Project to regional cumulative impacts is not expected to be substantial.~~

~~Water quality impacts from the proposed I-5/SR-126 Interchange Project, as well as the above listed projects, would be less than significant. Additionally, each of these projects stated that BMPs would be implemented and impacts fully mitigated. These projects would, nonetheless, contribute to regional, cumulative water quality impacts. However, the contribution of the I-5/SR-126 Interchange Project to regional cumulative impacts is not expected to be substantial.~~

### 5.15.1.3 Agriculture (Question 26)

~~The proposed project would contribute to regional cumulative impacts from the following projects:~~

~~The proposed project would contribute to regional cumulative impacts from the following projects:~~

- ~~• Valencia Commerce Center Expansion~~
- ~~• Commerce Center Drive Extension and Bridge over Castaic Creek~~
- ~~• I-5/Hasley Canyon Road Interchange Project~~
- ~~• I-5/Magic Mountain Parkway Interchange Project~~
- ~~• I-5/Rye Canyon Road Ramp Improvement Project~~
- ~~• I-5/Valencia Boulevard Interchange Improvements~~
- ~~• SR-126/Commerce Center Drive Interchange Improvement Project~~

~~—Valencia Commerce Center Expansion~~

~~—Commerce Center Drive Extension and Bridge over Castaic Creek~~

~~—I-5/Hasley Canyon Road Interchange Project~~

~~—I-5/Magic Mountain Parkway Interchange Project~~

~~—I-5/Rye Canyon Road Ramp Improvement Project~~

~~—I-5/Valencia Boulevard Interchange Improvements~~

~~—SR-126/Commerce Center Drive Interchange Improvement Project~~

~~The loss of agricultural lands resulting from the proposed I-5/SR-126 Interchange Project, as well as the projects listed above, would result in cumulative agricultural losses within the~~

~~Santa Clarita Valley. However, these losses are not considered substantial impacts either: (1) because the land was already committed to uses other than agriculture in an approved Areawide or General plan, or (2) because the area is not being actively farmed. These projects would, nonetheless, contribute to regional, cumulative impacts. However, the contribution of the I-5/SR-126 Interchange Project to regional cumulative impacts is not expected to be substantial. The loss of agricultural lands resulting from the proposed I-5/SR-126 Interchange Project, as well as the above listed projects, would result in cumulative agricultural losses within the Santa Clarita Valley. However, these losses are not considered substantial impacts either: (1) because the land was already committed to uses other than agriculture in an approved Areawide or General plan, or (2) because the area is not being actively farmed. These projects would, nonetheless, contribute to regional, cumulative impacts. However, the contribution of the I-5/SR-126 Interchange Project to regional cumulative impacts is not expected to be substantial.~~

#### 5.15.1.4 Transportation and Circulation (Questions 44 and 45)

#### ~~5.15.1.4 Transportation and Circulation (Questions 44 and 45)~~

~~The proposed project would contribute to regional cumulative impacts from the following projects:~~

~~The proposed project would contribute to regional cumulative impacts from the following projects:~~

- Valencia Commerce Center Expansion
- Commerce Center Drive Extension and Bridge over Castaic Creek
- Newhall Ranch Road Connection
- I-5/Hasley Canyon Road Interchange Project
- I-5/Magic Mountain Parkway Interchange Project
- I-5/Rye Canyon Road Ramp Improvement Project
- I-5/Valencia Boulevard Interchange Improvements
- Santa Clara River Bridge Replacement at I-5
- SR-126/Commerce Center Drive Interchange Improvement Project

~~—Valencia Commerce Center Expansion  
—Commerce Center Drive Extension and Bridge over Castaic Creek  
—Newhall Ranch Road Connection  
—I-5/Hasley Canyon Road Interchange Project  
—I-5/Magic Mountain Parkway Interchange Project  
—I-5/Rye Canyon Road Ramp Improvement Project  
—I-5/Valencia Boulevard Interchange Improvements  
—Santa Clara River Bridge Replacement at I-5  
—SR-126/Commerce Center Drive Interchange Improvement Project~~

~~The operation of the proposed I-5/SR-126 Interchange Project, as well as the projects listed above, would result in cumulative impacts to traffic and circulation within the Santa Clarita Valley. These impacts would result from either the generation of additional traffic within the area (e.g., Valencia Commerce Center Expansion and Commerce Center Drive Extension and Bridge over Castaic Creek), or from short-term lane closures and traffic detours (e.g.,~~

other listed projects). For all projects listed, impacts resulting from lane closures or traffic detours would be mitigated through the use of appropriate staging to avoid long duration closures; development of Traffic Management Plans; cooperation among Caltrans, City of Santa Clarita, and Los Angeles County staff; and implementation of signage programs. Despite these mitigation measures, these projects would, nonetheless, contribute to regional, cumulative traffic and circulation impacts. However, the contribution of the I-5/SR-126 Interchange Project to regional cumulative impacts is not expected to be substantial. Additionally, the I-5/SR-126 Interchange Project would not generate additional traffic.

The operation of the proposed I-5/SR-126 Interchange Project, as well as the above-listed projects, would result in cumulative impacts to traffic and circulation within the Santa Clarita Valley. These impacts would result from either the generation of additional traffic within the area (e.g., Valencia Commerce Center Expansion and Commerce Center Drive Extension and Bridge over Castaic Creek), or from short term lane closures and traffic detours (e.g., other listed projects). For all projects listed, impacts resulting from lane closures or traffic detours would be mitigated through the use of appropriate staging to avoid long duration closures; development of Traffic Management Plans; cooperation among Caltrans, City of Santa Clarita, and Los Angeles County staff; and implementation of signage programs. Despite these mitigation measures, these projects would, nonetheless, contribute to regional, cumulative traffic and circulation impacts. However, the contribution of the I-5/SR-126 Interchange Project to regional cumulative impacts is not expected to be substantial. Additionally, the I-5/SR-126 Interchange Project would not generate additional traffic.

### 5.15.2 Mitigation

No mitigation is necessary because the proposed I-5/SR-126 Interchange Project would not substantially contribute to cumulative impacts for any environmental resource areas within the Santa Clarita Valley. No mitigation is necessary because the proposed I-5/SR-126 Interchange Project would not substantially contribute to cumulative impacts for any environmental resource areas within the Santa Clarita Valley.

## 6 Consultation and Coordination

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### 6.1 ~~Agency~~ Agency Consultation

During the preparation of this IS/EA, monthly PDT meetings were held to discuss design options, factors to be considered during the environmental study process, and scheduling issues. Staff from Caltrans, FHWA, and CH2M HILL attended these meetings.

As part of the coordination necessary for the environmental study process, the following federal, state, and local agencies were consulted:

- South Central Coastal Information Center, University of California, Los Angeles
- U.S. ACOE
- Los Angeles County Flood Control Department
- Los Angeles County Planning Department
- Native American Heritage Commission
- SCAQMD
- ~~U.S. Department of Agriculture, Natural Resources Conservation Service~~ ~~U.S. Department of Agriculture, Natural Resources Conservation Service~~

Staff from these agencies provided substantive information regarding the presence of environmental resources within the project area, regulations governing those resources, impact assessment methodologies, significance of environmental impacts, and the design of any necessary mitigation measures. While no formal or informal consultation with most of these agencies is required, further consultation ~~formal or informal consultation with most of these agencies is required, further consultation~~ and coordination may be necessary at a later date during the permitting process.

### 6.2 ~~Public~~ Public Coordination

As part of ongoing consultation for this environmental process, a “Notice of Opportunity for a Public Meeting” was published on November 20 and December 19, 2000, in the following newspapers serving the proposed project area ~~part of ongoing consultation for this environmental process, a “Notice of Opportunity for a Public Meeting” was published on November 20 and December 19, 2000, in the following newspapers serving the proposed project area:~~

- Los Angeles Times, Valley Edition
- The Signal
- La Opinion

~~—Los Angeles Times, Valley Edition~~  
~~—The Signal~~  
~~—La Opinion~~

A copy of the advertisement is included in Appendix CA. Additionally, the agencies, organizations, and individuals, included in Appendix DB, received a copy of the IS/EA, along with a letter notifying them of the Public Comment Period and Notice of Opportunity for a Public Meeting. At the close of the public comment period, no requests for a Public Meeting had been received. Twelve comment letters were received. A copy of those letters and responses to the comments are included in Appendix A. ~~A copy of the advertisement is included in Appendix A. Additionally, the agencies, organizations, and individuals, included in Appendix B, received a copy of the IS/EA, along with a letter notifying them of the Public Comment Period and Notice of Opportunity for a Public Meeting. At the close of the public comment period, no requests for a Public Meeting had been received. Twelve comment letters were received. A copy of those letters and responses to the comments are included in Appendix EC.~~

# 7 List of Preparers

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- CH2M HILL (Prime)
  - Jamal Salman — Project Manager
  - Jeff Bingham — IS/EA Manager
  - Karen DiCarlo — IS/EA Task Leader
  - Gene Strojek — Project Engineer
  - John Castleberry — Task Leader, Air Quality Analysis
  - Keith McGregor — Air Quality Analyst
  - Farshad Farhang — Task Leader, Noise Analysis
  - Earl Byron — Task Leader, Water Resources Analysis
  - Robert Henderson — Floodplain Analyst
  - Gabriel Silva — Initial Site Assessment Analyst
- Bon Terra Consulting (Subconsultant)
  - Ann Johnston — Biological Survey Project Manager
  - Sandra Leatherman — Senior Biologist, Vegetation Mapping and Plant Survey
  - Amber Oneal — Ecologist, Vegetation Mapping and Plant/Wildlife Survey
  - Mike Couffer — Ecologist, Wildlife Survey
- Greenwood & Associates (Subconsultant)
  - John Foster — ASR/HASR Project Manager
  - James Schmidt — Lead Archaeological Surveyor
  - Dana Slawson — Lead Historic Architecture Surveyor

## 8 References

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~~County of Los Angeles Fire Department, Battalion 6, Fire Department 76. Personal Communication with Captain Miller regarding response times for Fire Station 76. 2001.~~
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- 
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## Appendix A

### Response to USFWS Biological Concerns

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## Appendix B

### Negative Historic Property Survey Report

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## **Appendix C**

### **Notice of Opportunity for a Public Meeting**

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## Appendix D

### IS/EA Circulation List ~~Response to Comments~~

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## **Appendix E**

### **Response to Comments**

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Appendix F  
Mitigation Monitoring ~~Report~~ Summary Table

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## **FEDERAL**

### **Environmental Protection Agency**

Ariel Rios Building, Room 7241  
1200 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20460

### **Environmental Protection Agency**

Region 9  
75 Hawthorne Street  
San Francisco, CA 94105  
ATTN: EIS Coordinator

### **Federal Emergency Management Agency**

Region 9, Building 105  
Presidio, CA 94129  
ATTN: Regional Director

### **Federal Transit Administration**

Region 9  
201 Mission Street, Suite 2210  
San Francisco, CA 94105

### **National Park Service**

30401 Agoura Road  
Agoura Hills, CA 91301  
ATTN: Vondell Sherer

### **U.S. Army Corps of Engineers**

Los Angeles District  
Regulation Branch  
911 Wilshire Avenue, 11<sup>th</sup> Floor  
Los Angeles, CA 90017-3401

### **U.S. Department of Agriculture**

Washington, DC 20250  
ATTN: Office of the Secretary

### **U.S. Department of Energy**

Office of Environmental Compliance  
1000 Independence Ave., SW, Rm. 4G-064  
Washington, DC 20585  
ATTN: Director

### **U.S. Department of Health and Human Services**

Office of Environmental Affairs  
200 Independence Ave. SW, Rm. 537 F  
Washington, DC 20201  
ATTN: Director

### **U.S. Department of Housing & Urban Development**

450 Golden Gate Avenue  
P.O. Box 36003  
San Francisco, CA 94102  
ATTN: Environmental Clearance Officer

### **U.S. Department of Interior**

Office of Env. Policy & Compliance  
Main Interior Building, Room 2340  
1849 C Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20240  
ATTN: Director

### **U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service**

Ventura Field Office  
2493 Portola Road, Suite B  
Ventura, CA 93003

### **U.S. Forest Service**

30800 Bouquet Canyon Road  
Santa Clarita, CA 91350

### **USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service**

44811 North Date Avenue, Suite G  
Lancaster, CA 93534  
ATTN: Paul Nguyen

### **The Honorable Dianne Feinstein**

United States Senator  
312 North Spring Street, Suite 1748  
Los Angeles, CA 90012

### **The Honorable Barbara Boxer**

United States Senator  
11111 Santa Monica Boulevard, Suite 915  
Los Angeles, CA 90025

**The Honorable Buck McKeon**  
United States Congressman  
23929 West Valencia Boulevard, Suite 410  
Santa Clarita, CA 91355

**CALIFORNIA**

**California Department of Conservation**  
801 "K" Street  
Sacramento, CA 95814  
ATTN: Director

**California Department of Fish and Game**  
330 Golden Shore, Suite 50  
Long Beach, CA 90802  
ATTN: Fred A. Worthley

**California Department of Parks  
and Recreation**  
1416 Ninth Street  
Sacramento, CA 95814  
ATTN: Director

**California Department of  
Water Resources**  
1416 Ninth Street, #1115-1  
Sacramento, CA 95801  
ATTN: David N. Kennedy

**California Department of  
Water Resources**  
1020 Ninth Street, 3<sup>rd</sup> Floor  
Sacramento, CA 95814  
ATTN: Nadell Gayou

**California Highway Patrol**  
28648 The Old Road  
Santa Clarita, CA 91355  
ATTN: Captain Greg Augusta

**California Department of  
Food & Agriculture**  
1220 N Street  
Sacramento, CA 95814  
ATTN: Environmental Review

**California Air Resources Board**  
1102 Q Street  
Sacramento, CA 95814  
ATTN: Executive Officer

**California Integrated Waste  
Management Board**  
8800 Cal Center Drive  
Sacramento, CA 95826  
ATTN: Jeannie Blakeslee

**State Water Resources Control Board**  
901 P Street  
Sacramento, CA 95814  
ATTN: Executive Officer

**Native American Heritage Commission**  
915 Capitol Mall, Rm. 288  
Sacramento, CA 95814  
ATTN: William Johnson

**Los Angeles County  
Sheriff's Department**  
23740 Magic Mountain Parkway  
Santa Clarita, CA 91355  
ATTN: Captain Mike Quinn

**South Coast Air Quality  
Management District**  
21865 East Copley Drive  
Diamond Bar, CA 91765  
ATTN: Dr. James Lents

**University of California**  
Budget, Analysis, and Planning  
247 University Hall  
Berkeley, CA 94720  
ATTN: Assistant Vice President

**The Honorable Tom McClintock**  
California State Senate  
2345 Erringer Road, Suite 212  
Simi Valley, CA 93065

## **COUNTY/REGIONAL**

### **Los Angeles County Environmental Programs**

Environmental Engineering & Planning  
900 South Freemont  
Alhambra, CA 91803

### **Los Angeles County Fire Department**

23757 Valencia Boulevard  
Santa Clarita, CA 91355  
ATTN: Nina Johnson

### **Los Angeles County Flood Control**

23757 West Valencia Boulevard  
Santa Clarita, CA 91355  
ATTN: Steve Berger

### **Los Angeles County Health Services**

Noise Division  
2525 Corporate Place  
Monterey Park, CA 91754  
ATTN: Frank Gomez

### **County of Los Angeles Parks & Recreation**

433 South Vermont Avenue  
Los Angeles, CA 90020  
ATTN: Joan Ruppert

### **Los Angeles County Public Health Programs & Services**

Environmental Health Division  
2525 Corporate Place  
Monterey Park, CA 91754  
ATTN: Jack Petralia

### **Los Angeles County Public Library**

23743 West Valencia Boulevard  
Valencia, CA 91355

### **Los Angeles County Public Library**

Newhall Library  
22704 West 9<sup>th</sup> Street  
Newhall, CA 91321

### **Los Angeles County Public Works**

Planning Division  
900 South Freemont Avenue  
Alhambra, CA 91803

### **Los Angeles County Regional Planning**

320 West Temple Street, Room 1101  
Los Angeles, CA 90012  
ATTN: William Miller

### **Los Angeles County Regional Planning**

Subdivisions Section  
320 West Temple Street, 13<sup>th</sup> Floor  
Los Angeles, CA 90012  
ATTN: Ellen Fitzgerald

### **Los Angeles County Sanitation District**

1955 Workman Mill Road  
Whittier, CA 90601  
ATTN: Ruth Charles

### **Los Angeles Department of Water and Power**

Chief Real Estate Office  
111 North Hope Street, Room 1208  
Los Angeles, CA 90012

### **Los Angeles County Natural History Museum**

900 Exposition Boulevard  
Los Angeles, CA 90007

### **Metropolitan Transportation Authority**

CMP/Environmental Review  
One Gateway Plaza  
Los Angeles, CA 90012

### **Southern California Association of Governments**

818 West 7<sup>th</sup> Street, 12<sup>th</sup> Floor  
Los Angeles, CA 90017-3435  
ATTN: Director, Planning & Policy  
Department

### **Supervisor Michael D. Antonovich County of Los Angeles**

23920 Valencia Boulevard, Suite 265  
Santa Clarita, CA 91355

## **CITY**

### **City of Santa Clarita**

Parks, Recreation & Community Services  
23920 Valencia Boulevard  
Santa Clarita, CA 91355  
ATTN: Director

### **City of Santa Clarita**

Planning & Building Services  
23920 Valencia Boulevard  
Santa Clarita, CA 91355  
ATTN: Director

### **City of Santa Clarita**

Transportation & Engineering Services  
23920 Valencia Boulevard  
Santa Clarita, CA 91355  
ATTN: Director

### **Santa Clarita Community College District**

College of the Canyons  
26455 Rockwell Canyon Road  
Santa Clarita, CA 91355  
ATTN: Dr. Dianne Van Hook, President

### **Santa Clarita Transit**

25663 Avenue Stanford  
Santa Clarita, CA 91355  
ATTN: Ron Kilcoyne

### **Santa Clarita Valley Chamber of Commerce**

23920 Valencia Boulevard, Suite 100  
Santa Clarita, CA 91355-2175  
ATTN: Connie Worden-Roberts,  
President

### **Castaic Town Council**

P.O. Box 325  
Castaic, CA 91310  
ATTN: Richard Massey, President

### **Castaic Chamber of Commerce**

31744 Castaic Road  
Castaic, CA 91384  
ATTN: Dalton Celais, President

## **LAFCO**

500 West Temple Street, Room 383  
Los Angeles, CA 90012  
ATTN: June Savala

### **Metropolitan Water District**

Planning Division  
700 North Alameda Street  
Los Angeles, CA 90012

### **Valencia Water Company**

24631 Avenue Rockefeller  
Valencia, CA 91355  
ATTN: Robert DiPrimo, President

### **Castaic Union School District**

Dr. Alan Nishino  
31616 North Ridge Route Road  
Castaic, CA 91384

### **Jo Anne Darcy**

City of Santa Clarita Mayor  
23920 Valencia Boulevard, Suite 300  
Santa Clarita, CA 91355

### **Laurene Weste**

City of Santa Clarita Mayor Pro-Tem  
23920 Valencia Boulevard, Suite 300  
Santa Clarita, CA 91355

### **Frank Ferry**

City of Santa Clarita Councilmember  
23920 Valencia Boulevard, Suite 300  
Santa Clarita, CA 91355

### **Cameron Smyth**

City of Santa Clarita Councilmember  
23920 Valencia Boulevard, Suite 300  
Santa Clarita, CA 91355

### **Bob Kellar**

City of Santa Clarita Councilmember  
23920 Valencia Boulevard, Suite 300  
Santa Clarita, CA 91355

### **George A. Carvalho**

City of Santa Clarita City Manager  
23920 Valencia Boulevard, Suite 300  
Santa Clarita, CA 91355

## **ORGANIZATIONS**

### **Audubon Society**

San Fernando Valley Chapter  
P. O. Box 2504  
Van Nuys, CA 91404  
ATTN: Christine Smith

### **California Native Plant Society**

909 12th Street, Suite 116  
Sacramento, CA 95814

### **California Wildlife Federation**

P.O. Box 1527  
Sacramento, CA 95812-1527

### **Friends of the Santa Clara River**

660 Randy Drive  
Newbury Park, CA 91320-3036  
ATTN: Ron Bottorff, Chair

### **Live Oak Civic Association**

29619 Newport Place  
Castaic, CA 91310  
ATTN: Mary Aurit

### **Museum of Vertebrate Zoology**

2593 Life Sciences Building  
Berkeley, CA 94720

### **Newhall Land & Farming Co.**

23823 Valencia Boulevard  
Valencia, CA 91355-2194  
ATTN: Greg Medeiros (Library)

### **Newhall Land & Farming Co.**

23823 Valencia Boulevard  
Valencia, CA 91355-2194  
ATTN: Jerry Domke

### **Northbridge Home Owners Association**

28245 Avenue Crocker, Suite 104  
Santa Clarita, CA 91355  
ATTN: Crown Management

### **North Park Home Owners Association**

28245 Avenue Crocker, Suite #104  
Santa Clarita, CA 91355  
ATTN: Crown Management

### **Santa Clarita Civic Association**

P.O. Box 384  
Santa Clarita, CA 91322  
ATTN: Tamsie Irvan, President

### **Santa Clarita Oak Conservancy**

P.O. Box 800520  
Santa Clarita, CA 91380  
ATTN: Ken Buchen

### **Santa Clarita Organization for the Planning of the Environment (SCOPE)**

P.O. Box 1182  
Santa Clarita, CA 91351  
ATTN: Lynne Plambeck

### **Santa Clarita Valley Historical Society**

P.O. Box 221925  
Newhall, CA 91322

### **Senior Center**

22900 Market Street  
Newhall, CA 91321  
ATTN: Stan Sierad

### **Sierra Club**

3435 Wilshire Avenue, Suite 320  
Santa Clarita, CA 90010-1904  
ATTN: Lynn Plambeck

### **Six Flags Magic Mountain**

P.O. Box 5500  
Valencia, CA 91385  
ATTN: Del Holland, President

### **Six Flags Magic Mountain**

26101 Magic Mountain Pkwy.  
Valencia, Ca 91355  
ATTN: Dan Duncan,  
Safety/Environmental Manager

### **Stevenson Ranch Residents for Responsible Development**

25849 Browning Place  
Stevenson Ranch, CA 91381  
ATTN: Keith Pritsker

### **The Nature Conservancy**

California Regional Office  
201 Mission Street, 4th Floor  
San Francisco, CA 94105

**Valencia Industrial Association**

P.O. Box 55592

Santa Clarita, CA 91385

ATTN: Kathy Norris

**CITIZENS**

**Curt Kendall**

23916 Sarda Rd.

Valencia, CA 91355

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SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA



**ASSOCIATION of  
GOVERNMENTS**

**Main Office**

818 West Seventh Street  
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f (213) 236-1825

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Bushman, Fontana • Lee Ann Garcia, Grand Terrace  
• Gertie Norton Perry, Chino Hills • Judith Valle,  
San Bernardino

Ventura County: Judy Miles, Ventura County •  
Douglas De Paoli, San Buenaventura • Gino Becerra,  
Simi Valley • Ron Young, San Francisco

Riverside County Transportation Commission:  
Robin Lowe, Hemet

Ventura County Transportation Commission:  
Bill Davis, Simi Valley

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December 11, 2000

Mr. Ronald J. Kosinski, Chief *RJK*  
Caltrans District 7  
Office of Environmental Planning  
120 South Spring Street  
Los Angeles, CA 90012-3606

RE: **Comments on the Initial Study / Environmental Assessment for the  
Interstate 5 / State Route 126 Interchange Project - SCAG No. I 20000584**

Dear Mr. Kosinski:

Thank you for submitting **Initial Study / Environmental Assessment for the Interstate  
5 / State Route 126 Interchange Project** to SCAG for review and comment. As  
areawide clearinghouse for regionally significant projects, SCAG assists cities, counties  
and other agencies in reviewing projects and plans for consistency with regional plans.

It is recognized that the proposed Project considers construction of new ramps, the  
reconstruction of existing ramps, replacement of the I-5 / SR-126 separation, widening of  
the Old Road undercrossing, and widening of SR-126. The proposed Project is located in  
Los Angeles County, northwest of the City of Santa Clarita.

SCAG has evaluated the Initial Study / Environmental Assessment for the Interstate 5 /  
State Route 126 Interchange Project with the Regional Comprehensive Plan and Guide  
(RCPG) and Regional Transportation Plan (RTP). In addition, the proposed Project is  
listed in the Regional Transportation Improvement Program (RTIP).

Policies of SCAG's RCPG and RTP, which may be applicable to your project, are  
outlined in the attachment. If you have any questions regarding the attached comments,  
please contact me at (213) 236-1867. Thank you.

Sincerely,

*Jeffrey M. Smith*

JEFFREY M. SMITH, AICP  
Senior Planner,  
Intergovernmental Review

## Comment 1

No comment required.

December 11, 2000  
Mr. Ron Kosinski, Chief  
Page 2

**COMMENTS ON THE  
INITIAL STUDY / ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT  
FOR THE  
INTERSTATE 5 / STATE ROUTE 126  
INTERCHANGE PROJECT  
SCAG NO. I 20000584**

**PROJECT DESCRIPTION**

It is recognized that the proposed Project considers construction of new ramps, the reconstruction of existing ramps, replacement of the I-5 / SR-126 separation, widening of the Old Road undercrossing, and widening of SR-126. The proposed Project is located in Los Angeles County, northwest of the City of Santa Clarita..

**CONSISTENCY WITH REGIONAL COMPREHENSIVE PLAN AND GUIDE POLICIES**

The **Growth Management Chapter (GMC)** of the Regional Comprehensive Plan and Guide (RCPG) contains the following policies that are particularly applicable to the Project.

- 3.01 The population, housing, and jobs forecasts, which are adopted by SCAG's Regional Council and that reflect local plans and policies, shall be used by SCAG in all phases of implementation and review.*
- 3.03 The timing, financing, and location of public facilities, utility systems, and transportation systems shall be used by SCAG to implement the region's growth policies.*

**Regional Transportation Plan**

The Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) also has goals, objectives, policies and actions pertinent to this proposed project. This RTP links the goal of sustaining mobility with the goals of fostering economic development, enhancing the environment, reducing energy consumption, promoting transportation-friendly development patterns, and encouraging fair and equitable access to residents affected by socio-economic, geographic and commercial limitations. Among the relevant goals, objectives, policies and actions of the RTP are the following:

**Core Regional Transportation Plan Policies**

- 4.01 Transportation investments shall be based on SCAG's adopted Regional Performance Indicators.*

December 11, 2000  
 Mr. Ron Kosinski, Chief  
 Page 3

Mobility - Transportation Systems should meet the public need for improved access, and for safe, comfortable, convenient and economical movements of people and goods.

- Average Work Trip Travel Time in Minutes – 22 minutes
- PM Peak Highway Speed – 33 mph
- Percent of PM Peak Travel in Delay (All Trips) – 33%

Accessibility - Transportation Systems should ensure the ease with which opportunities are reached. Transportation and land use measures should be employed to ensure minimal time and cost.

- Work Opportunities within 25 Minutes – 88%

Environment - Transportation Systems should sustain development and preservation of the existing system and the environment. (All Trips)

- Meeting Federal and State Standards – Meet Air Plan Emission Budgets

Reliability - Reasonable and dependable levels of service by mode. (All Trips)

- Transit – 63%
- Highway – 76%

Safety - Transportation Systems should provide minimal, risk, accident, death and injury. (All Trips)

- Fatalities Per Million Passenger Miles – 0.008
- Injury Accidents – 0.929

Livable Communities - Transportation Systems should facilitate Livable Communities in which all residents have access to all opportunities with minimal travel time. (All Trips)

- Vehicle Trip Reduction – 1.5%
- Vehicle Miles Traveled Reduction – 10.0%

Equity - The benefits of transportation investments should be equitably distributed among all ethnic, age and income groups. (All trips)

- Low-Income (Household Income \$12,000)) Share of Net Benefits – Equitable Distribution of Benefits

Cost-Effectiveness - Maximize return on transportation investment. (All Trips)

- Net Present Value – Maximum Return on Transportation Investment
- Value of a Dollar Invested – Maximum Return on Transportation Investment

4.02 Transportation investments shall mitigate environmental impacts to an acceptable level.

4.04 Transportation Control Measures shall be a priority.

December 11, 2000  
Mr. Ron Kosinski, Chief  
Page 4

- 4.16 *Maintaining and operating the existing transportation system will be a priority over expanding capacity.*

**GMC POLICIES RELATED TO THE RCPG GOAL TO IMPROVE THE REGIONAL QUALITY OF LIFE**

The Growth Management goals to attain mobility and clean air goals and to develop urban forms that enhance quality of life, that accommodate a diversity of life styles, that preserve open space and natural resources, and that are aesthetically pleasing and preserve the character of communities, enhance the regional strategic goal of maintaining the regional quality of life. The evaluation of the proposed project in relation to the following policies would be intended to provide direction for plan implementation, and does not allude to regional mandates.

- 3.18 *Encourage planned development in locations least likely to cause environmental impact.*
- 3.20 *Support the protection of vital resources such as wetlands, groundwater recharge areas, woodlands, production lands, and land containing unique and endangered plants and animals.*
- 3.21 *Encourage the implementation of measures aimed at the preservation and protection of recorded and unrecorded cultural resources and archaeological sites.*
- 3.22 *Discourage development, or encourage the use of special design requirements, in areas with steep slopes, high fire, flood, and seismic hazards.*
- 3.23 *Encourage mitigation measures that reduce noise in certain locations, measures aimed at preservation of biological and ecological resources, measures that would reduce exposure to seismic hazards, minimize earthquake damage, and to develop emergency response and recovery plans.*

**GMC POLICIES RELATED TO THE RCPG GOAL TO PROVIDE SOCIAL, POLITICAL, AND CULTURAL EQUITY**

The Growth Management Goal to develop urban forms that avoid economic and social polarization promotes the regional strategic goal of minimizing social and geographic disparities and of reaching equity among all segments of society. The evaluation of the proposed project in relation to the policy stated below is intended guide direction for the accomplishment of this goal, and does not infer regional mandates and interference with local land use powers.

- 3.27 *Support local jurisdictions and other service providers in their efforts to develop sustainable communities and provide, equally to all members of society, accessible*

December 11, 2000  
 Mr. Ron Kosinski, Chief  
 Page 5

*and effective services such as: public education, housing, health care, social services, recreational facilities, law enforcement, and fire protection.*

#### **AIR QUALITY CHAPTER CORE ACTIONS**

The **Air Quality Chapter** core actions related to the proposed project includes:

- 5.07 *Determine specific programs and associated actions needed (e.g., indirect source rules, enhanced use of telecommunications, provision of community based shuttle services, provision of demand management based programs, or vehicle-miles-traveled/emission fees) so that options to command and control regulations can be assessed.*
- 5.11 *Through the environmental document review process, ensure that plans at all levels of government (regional, air basin, county, subregional and local) consider air quality, land use, transportation and economic relationships to ensure consistency and minimize conflicts.*

#### **WATER QUALITY CHAPTER RECOMMENDATIONS AND POLICY OPTIONS**

The **Water Quality Chapter** core recommendations and policy options relate to the two water quality goals: to restore and maintain the chemical, physical and biological integrity of the nation's water; and, to achieve and maintain water quality objectives that are necessary to protect all beneficial uses of all waters.

- 11.07 *Encourage water reclamation throughout the region where it is cost-effective, feasible, and appropriate to reduce reliance on imported water and wastewater discharges. Current administrative impediments to increased use of wastewater should be addressed.*

#### **CONCLUSIONS**

All feasible measures needed to mitigate any potentially negative regional impacts associated with the proposed project should be implemented and monitored, as required by CEQA.

December 11, 2000  
 Mr. Ron Kosinski, Chief  
 Page 6

\*\*\*  
**ENDNOTE**

**SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA ASSOCIATION OF GOVERNMENTS**

*Roles and Authorities*

SCAG is a **Joint Powers Agency** established under California Government Code Section 6502 et seq. Under federal and state law, SCAG is designated as a Council of Governments (COG), a Regional Transportation Planning Agency (RTPA), and a Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO). SCAG's mandated roles and responsibilities include the following:

SCAG is designated by the federal government as the Region's **Metropolitan Planning Organization** and mandated to maintain a continuing, cooperative, and comprehensive transportation planning process resulting in a Regional Transportation Plan and a Regional Transportation Improvement Program pursuant to 23 U.S.C. §134(g)-(h), 49 U.S.C. §1607(f)-(g) et seq., 23 C.F.R. §450, and 49 C.F.R. §613. SCAG is also the designated **Regional Transportation Planning Agency**, and as such is responsible for both preparation of the Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) and Regional Transportation Improvement Program (RTIP) under California Government Code Section 65080.

SCAG is responsible for developing the demographic projections and the integrated land use, housing, employment, and transportation programs, measures, and strategies portions of the **South Coast Air Quality Management Plan**, pursuant to California Health and Safety Code Section 40460(b)-(c). SCAG is also designated under 42 U.S.C. §7504(a) as a **Co-Lead Agency** for air quality planning for the Central Coast and Southeast Desert Air Basin District.

SCAG is responsible under the Federal Clean Air Act for determining **Conformity** of Projects, Plans and Programs to the Air Plan, pursuant to 42 U.S.C. §7506.

Pursuant to California Government Code Section 65089.2, SCAG is responsible for **reviewing all Congestion Management Plans (CMPs) for consistency with regional transportation plans** required by Section 65080 of the Government Code. SCAG must also evaluate the consistency and compatibility of such programs within the region.

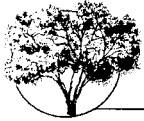
SCAG is the authorized regional agency for **Inter-Governmental Review** of Programs proposed for federal financial assistance and direct development activities, pursuant to Presidential Executive Order 12,372 (replacing A-95 Review).

SCAG reviews, pursuant to Public Resources Code Sections 21083 and 21087, **Environmental Impact Reports** of projects of regional significance for consistency with regional plans [California Environmental Quality Act Guidelines Sections 15206 and 15125(b)].

Pursuant to 33 U.S.C. §1288(a)(2) (Section 208 of the Federal Water Pollution Control Act), SCAG is the authorized **Area-wide Waste Treatment Management Planning Agency**.

SCAG is responsible for preparation of the **Regional Housing Needs Assessment**, pursuant to California Government Code Section 65584(a).

SCAG is responsible (with the San Diego Association of Governments and the Santa Barbara County/Cities Area Planning Council) for preparing the **Southern California Hazardous Waste Management Plan** pursuant to California Health and Safety Code Section 25135.3.



COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES  
DEPARTMENT OF PARKS AND RECREATION



Rodney E. Cooper, Director

December 13, 2000

Mr. Ronald Kosinski, Chief  
Caltrans District 7  
Office of Environmental Planning  
120 S. Spring Street  
Los Angeles, California 90012

Attention: Chris D. Benz-Blumberg  
Environmental Planner

I-5/SR-126 INTERCHANGE PROJECT

The draft Initial Study/Environmental Assessment for the I-5/SR-126 Interchange Project has been reviewed for its potential impact on the facilities under the jurisdiction of this department. The proposed project to improve the Interstate 5/State Route 126 (I-5/SR-124) interchange, located in the city of Santa Clarita will not have an impact on the facilities of this department.

Thank you for including this department in the review. If we may be of further assistance, please contact Ms. Lillie Lowery, Park Planner, at (213) 738-2977.

Sincerely,

Larry Hensley  
Departmental Facilities Planner II

Executive Offices • 433 South Vermont Avenue • Los Angeles, CA 90020-1975 • (213) 738-2961

**Comment 2**

No comment required.



# COUNTY SANITATION DISTRICTS OF LOS ANGELES COUNTY

1955 Workman Mill Road, Whittier, CA 90601-1400  
Mailing Address: P.O. Box 4998, Whittier, CA 90607-4998  
Telephone: (562) 699-7411, FAX: (562) 699-5422  
www.lacsd.org

JAMES F. STAHL  
Chief Engineer and General Manager

December 14, 2000

File No: 32-00.04-00

Ms. Chris D. Benz-Blumberg  
Caltrans District 7  
Office of Environmental Planning  
120 S. Spring Street  
Los Angeles, CA 90012

Dear Ms. Benz-Blumberg:

## Interstate 5/State Route 126 Interchange Project

The County Sanitation Districts of Los Angeles County (Districts) received a Draft Initial Study/Environmental Assessment and Draft Negative Declaration for the subject project on November 30, 2000. We offer the following comments regarding sewerage service:

- The proposed project will impact an existing Districts' trunk sewer over which it will be constructed. An existing Districts' trunk sewer is located directly under and/or crosses directly beneath the proposed project alignment. The Districts cannot issue a detailed response to or permit construction of the proposed project until project plans and specifications which incorporate the Districts' sewer line are submitted. In order to prepare these plans, you will need to submit a map of the proposed project alignment, when available, to the attention of Mr. Tommy Sung of the Districts' Sewer Design Section at the address shown above. The Districts will then provide you with the plans for all Districts' facilities which will be impacted by the proposed project. Then, when revised plans which incorporate our sewers have been prepared, please submit copies of the same for our review and comment.

If you have any questions, please contact the undersigned at (562) 699-7411, extension 2717.

Very truly yours,

James F. Stahl

Ruth I. Frazen  
Engineering Technician  
Planning & Property Management Section

RIF:eg

c: S. Highter  
T. Sung

:\ODMA\PCDOCS\DM3\23051\



## Comment 3

The project's consultant team has recently submitted draft plans to the attention of Mr. Tommy Sung, with a cover letter advising the County Sanitation Districts that future plans will also be submitted for their approval and comment. Section 5.10 of the Initial Study/Environmental Assessment (IS/EA) has been revised to reflect potential impacts to the trunk sewer.



Gray Davis  
GOVERNOR

STATE OF CALIFORNIA

Governor's Office of Planning and Research  
State Clearinghouse



Steve Nissen  
ACTING DIRECTOR

**ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF RECEIPT**

DATE: December 15, 2000

TO: Chris Benz-Blumberg  
Department of Transportation, District 7  
120 South Spring Street  
Los Angeles, CA 90012

RE: I-5/ SR-126 Interchange Improvement Project  
SCH#: 2000111165

This is to acknowledge that the State Clearinghouse has received your environmental document for state review. The review period assigned by the State Clearinghouse is:

Review Start Date: November 27, 2000  
Review End Date: December 26, 2000

We have distributed your document to the following agencies and departments:

Air Resources Board, Major Industrial Projects  
California Highway Patrol  
Department of Conservation  
Department of Fish and Game, Region 5  
Department of Parks and Recreation  
Department of Toxic Substances Control  
Department of Water Resources  
Integrated Waste Management Board  
Native American Heritage Commission  
Office of Historic Preservation  
Regional Water Quality Control Board, Region 4  
Resources Agency  
Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy  
State Lands Commission

The State Clearinghouse will provide a closing letter with any state agency comments to your attention on the date following the close of the review period.

Thank you for your participation in the State Clearinghouse review process.

1400 TENTH STREET P.O. BOX 3044 SACRAMENTO, CALIFORNIA 95812-3044  
916-445-0613 FAX 916-323-3018 WWW.OPR.CA.GOV/CLEARINGHOUSE.HTML

**Comment 4**

No comment required.

STATE OF CALIFORNIA-THE RESOURCES AGENCY  
**DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND GAME**  
 South Coast Region  
 4949 Viewridge Avenue  
 San Diego, California 92123  
 (858) 467-4201  
 FAX (858) 467-4239

GRAY DAVIS, Governor



December 18, 2000

Mr. Chris Benz-Blumberg  
 Caltrans District 7  
 120 South Spring Street  
 Los Angeles, CA 90012

Dear Mr. Blumberg:

**Draft Initial Study/Environmental Assessment for  
 Interstate 5/State Route 126 Interchange Improvement  
 SCH # 2000111165, Los Angeles County**

The Department of Fish and Game (Department), has reviewed the Initial Study/Environmental Assessment (IS/EA) for impacts to biological resources. The proposed project includes improvements to the I-5/SR 126 interchange located in the City of Santa Clarita. Improvements include construction of new ramps, reconstruction of existing ramps, replacement of the I-5/SR 126 separation, widening of the Old Road under crossing and widening of SR-126.

The following statements and comments have been prepared pursuant to the Department's authority as Trustee Agency with jurisdiction over natural resources affected by the project (CEQA Section 15386) and pursuant to our authority as a Responsible Agency under CEQA Section 15381 over those aspects of the proposed project that come under the purview of the California Endangered Species Act (Fish and Game Code Section 2050 et seq) and Fish and Game Code Section 1600 et seq.:

**Impacts to Biological Resources**

1. San Diego Black-tailed jackrabbit (*Lepus townsendii*) - Section 3.8.2., page 3-9 of the IS/EA states that San Diego black-tailed jackrabbit is expected to occur on site.
  - a. The San Diego black-tailed jackrabbit is considered a Species of Special Concern by the Department and rare for the purposes of CEQA consideration (CEQA Guidelines 15380(d)). Section 15065 of the CEQA Guidelines provides that a lead agency make a mandatory finding of significance where a project has the potential to reduce the number of a rare or threatened species. In this case, the IS/EA provides no discussion regarding project impacts to the referenced jackrabbit under Section 3.8.3, Special Status Plant and Wildlife

**Comment 5A**

Section 3.8.3 would not discuss potential project impacts because that section provides existing conditions only. Section 5.7 – Biological Resources, provides a discussion of impacts to special-status plants and wildlife. That section states that no special-status wildlife species (i.e., including the San Diego Black-tailed jackrabbit) are anticipated within the project area. Consequently, no significant project impacts to these species are anticipated, and no mitigation measures are necessary.

Mr. Chris Benz-Blumberg  
December 18, 2000  
Page Two

- B | Species, nor proposes mitigation measures to reduce any adverse impacts to less than significant.
- B | b. The Department recommends pre-construction surveys for San Diego black-tailed jackrabbit nest sites within the project disturbance areas and avoidance of active nests until the young are fully independent.
2. Breeding Birds - The IS/EA states that two raptor nests were observed just offsite of the proposed project.
- C | a. All migratory nongame native bird species are protected by international treaty under the Federal Migratory Bird Treaty Act(MBTA) of 1918(50 C.F.R. Section 10.13). Sections 3503, 3503.5 and 3513 of the California Fish and Game Code prohibit take of all birds and their active nests including raptors and other migratory nongame birds (as listed under the Federal MBTA).
- D | b. Proposed project activities (including disturbances to vegetation) should take place outside of the breeding bird season (generally March 1- Aug 31) to avoid take (including disturbances which would cause abandonment of active nests containing eggs and/or young). Some species of birds such as raptors commence breeding prior to March 1 and this should be taken into consideration. If project activities cannot avoid the breeding bird season, a biological monitor should survey for active bird nests no sooner than two days prior to project related disturbances to breeding bird habitat on and adjacent to the proposed project site. Active nests shall be avoided and provided with a minimum buffer as determined by the biological monitor (the Department recommends a minimum 500 foot buffer for all active raptor nests.)

#### Impacts to Sensitive Botanical Resources

1. The IS/EA states that existing mixed sage-scrub east of I-5 within the project right of way is anticipated to be removed by an unrelated project prior to the proposed project but that this sage-scrub habitat may also be impacted by remedial grading from the proposed project and therefore may impact Slender and Plummer's mariposa lily, 1B listed plants and considered rare by the Department. The IS/EA acknowledges potential future focused surveys to determine the level of significance from project impacts on these rare plants should this area be impacted by the project and states that mitigation would be required.
- E | a. It should be determined if Slender Mariposa lily and/or Plummer's mariposa lily do in fact exist within the potential impact area and not defer impact analysis and specific mitigation proposals to a later time which is contrary to the intent of CEQA. Adverse impacts to rare plant species are considered significant under

#### Comment 5B

Per the request of the Department of Fish and Game, pre-construction surveys for the San Diego black-trailed jackrabbit nest sites will be performed. If active nests or dens are found, construction activities will be scheduled to avoid disturbance until the young in the nests are fully independent.

#### Comment 5C

Section 5.7 has been updated to reflect this information.

#### Comment 5D

Section 5.7 has been updated to reflect this information.

#### Comment 5E

Section 5.7 has been updated to reflect the focused special-status plant species survey conducted for the proposed project. It states that field surveys located a single individual of the club-haired mariposa lily within the study area. However, the site was graded as part of the construction for the Newhall Ranch Road extension, and the plant was removed. No other special-status species were observed during the focused survey. The focused survey recommended that because the only club-haired mariposa lily plant observed was removed, the proposed project would, therefore, not impact this species, and no mitigation would be warranted. However, Environmentally Sensitive Areas will be employed to ensure that construction activities do not occur outside of project limits.

Mr. Chris Benz-Blumberg  
December 18, 2000  
Page Three

CEQA and subject to the preparation of an Environmental Impact Report unless mitigation measures are conducted to reduce impacts below a level of significance.

The Department recommends that focused surveys be conducted within the mixed sage-scrub habitat which has the potential to be impacted by the proposed project and that specific mitigation measures be proposed to reduce impacts to below significance on any rare, threatened or endangered plant species. The Department recommends avoidance of all sensitive plant species.

Unless impacts to sensitive plant species and specific mitigation measures are divulged within the subject IS/EA, there are no assurances for the opportunity for public review and comment on any subsequently concluded project impact assessments and mitigation proposals.

#### Impacts to Riparian Resources

1. The IS/EA fails to mention the presence of a soft bottomed drainage channel supporting a growth of cottonwood and willow trees located adjacent to the proposed project site and whether proposed project activities will directly or indirectly impact this channel.
  - a. The Department requires a streambed agreement, pursuant to Section 1600 et seq. of the Fish and Game Code, with the applicant prior to any direct or indirect impact (including preliminary geotechnical activities) of a lake or stream bed, bank or channel or associated riparian resources. The Department's issuance of a stream bed alteration agreement is considered a project that is subject to CEQA. To facilitate our issuance of the agreement, the Department as a responsible agency under CEQA may consider the local jurisdiction's (lead agency) document for the project. To minimize additional requirements by the Department under CEQA the document should fully identify the potential impacts to stream or riparian resources and provide adequate avoidance, mitigation, monitoring and reporting commitments for issuance of the agreement. Early consultation is recommended, since modification of the proposed project may be required to avoid or reduce impacts to fish and wildlife resources. Please contact Ms. Betty Courtney, Environmental Specialists III, at (661) 263-8306 to discuss this further.

In conclusion, the Department recommends that the above concerns are addressed prior to lead agency approval of the propose project.

#### **Comment 5F**

See the response to Comment 5E.

#### **Comment 5G**

See the response to Comment 5E.

#### **Comment 5H**

The soft-bottomed drainage channel would not be affected by the proposed project. However, the construction of nearby commercial/industrial buildings have resulted in impacts to that channel – these changes are not part of this project. The only changes to drainage channels would be to the concrete-lined channel within the area. The required permits for this work have been added to Section 1.4.

Mr. Chris Benz-Blumberg  
December 18, 2000  
Page Four

Thank you for this opportunity to provide comment. Questions regarding this letter and further coordination on these issues should be directed to Mr. Scott Harris at (818) 360-8140.

Sincerely,



Mr. C.F. Raysbrook  
Regional Manager  
*Morgan Wehtje*

cc: Mr. Scott Harris  
Ms. Morgan Wehtje  
Ms. Mary Meyer  
Ms. Betty Courtney  
Department of Fish and Game  
  
State Clearinghouse  
Sacramento, California



COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES • DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH SERVICES  
ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH  
MOUNTAIN & RURAL / WATER, SEWERAGE & SUBDIVISION CONTROL PROGRAMS  
2525 Corporate Place, Room 150, Monterey Park, CA 91754-7631  
(323) 881-4147/4158  
FAX (323) 269-4327



December 19, 2000

Ronald Kosinski, Chief  
Caltrans District 7  
Office of Environmental Planning  
120 South Spring Street  
Los Angeles, California 90012  
Attn: Chris D. Benz-Blumberg

Re: File: 07-LA-5-KP R8.3-R9.7, 07-LA-126-KP R88.0-R90.4

Dear Mr. Kosinski:

This is in response to your Notice of Intent to Adopt a Negative Declaration for the above referenced project.

This Department has reviewed the information provided and has no comment.

If you have any questions or require further information, please contact me at 323-881-4157.

Very truly yours,

Richard Wagener, Chief  
Mountain & Rural / Water & Sewage Program

**Comment 6**

No comment required.

7

23920 Valencia Blvd.  
Suite 300  
Santa Clarita  
California 91355-2196  
Website: www.santa-clarita.com

Phone  
(661) 259-2489  
Fax  
(661) 259-8125



City of  
Santa Clarita

December 26, 2000

Mr. Ronald Kosinski  
Chief, Office of Environmental Planning  
Caltrans District 7  
120 S. Spring Street  
Los Angeles, CA 90012

Attn: Chris D. Benz-Blumberg

Subject: Interstate 5/SR-126 Interchange Project  
Draft Initial Study/Environmental Assessment

Dear Mr. Kosinski:

We have reviewed the draft Initial Study/Environmental Assessment (IS/EA) report for the subject project and are providing the following comments:

The preferred alternative proposes the abandonment of the existing eastbound hook ramps on SR-126 to the Henry Mayo Drive. There is an existing Los Angeles County Fire Department Station on Henry Mayo Drive, which may be impacted by this abandonment. The report should address this issue.

Please include these comments in the subject IS/EA. If you have any questions regarding these comments, please feel free to contact me at (661) 286-4057.

Sincerely,

Rabie J. Rahmani, P.E.  
Senior Traffic Engineer

RJR:AN:lkl  
c:\traffic\sr126\15.doc

cc: Anthony J. Nisich, Director of Transportation & Engineering Services  
Jeffery Lambert, Director of Planning & Building Services  
Bahman Janka, City Traffic Engineer  
Fred Follstad, Senior Planner



PRINTED ON RECYCLED PAPER

### **Comment 7**

Section 5.10 of the IS/EA has been revised to address potential impacts to the fire station located on Henry Mayo Drive.



Gray Davis  
GOVERNOR

STATE OF CALIFORNIA

Governor's Office of Planning and Research  
State Clearinghouse



Steve Nissen  
ACTING DIRECTOR

December 27, 2000

Chris Benz-Blumberg  
Department of Transportation, District 7  
120 South Spring Street  
Los Angeles, CA 90012

Subject: I-5/ SR-126 Interchange Improvement Project  
SCH#: 2000111165

Dear Chris Benz-Blumberg:

The State Clearinghouse submitted the above named Negative Declaration to selected state agencies for review. The review period closed on December 26, 2000, and no state agencies submitted comments by that date. This letter acknowledges that you have complied with the State Clearinghouse review requirements for draft environmental documents, pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act.

Please call the State Clearinghouse at (916) 445-0613 if you have any questions regarding the environmental review process. If you have a question about the above-named project, please refer to the ten-digit State Clearinghouse number when contacting this office.

Sincerely,

Terry Roberts  
Senior Planner, State Clearinghouse

1400 TENTH STREET P.O. BOX 3044 SACRAMENTO, CALIFORNIA 95812-3044  
916-445-0613 FAX 916-323-3018 [WWW.OPR.CA.GOV/CLEARINGHOUSE.HTML](http://WWW.OPR.CA.GOV/CLEARINGHOUSE.HTML)

### **Comment 8**

No comment required.



## UNITED STATES ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY

REGION IX

75 Hawthorne Street  
San Francisco, CA 94105-3901

187210-1

Ronald Kosinski, Chief  
Caltrans District 7  
Office of Environmental Planning  
120 South Spring Street  
Los Angeles, CA 90012

Attention: Chris Benz-Blumberg

Dear Mr. Kosinski:

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has reviewed the Initial Study/Environmental Assessment (EA 187210) dated November 22, 2000, for the **Interstate 5/State Route 126 Interchange Project** located in the City of Santa Clarita, northern Los Angeles County, California. The proposed project consists of the construction of new ramps, reconstruction of existing ramps, replacement of the I-5/SR-126 separation, widening of the undercrossing of The Old Road, and widening of SR-126 from four lanes to six. Our review is provided pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) regulations (40 CFR Parts 1500-1508), and Section 309 of the Clean Air Act.

In general, because the document has a very narrow scope of review and lacks an analysis of cumulative impacts, we find it inconclusive. The direct benefits of the project itself are difficult to assess because the document does not include an analysis of how the traffic flow improvements from this project would tie into the roads leading to and from this interchange, indirect environmental impacts are not properly identified, and cumulative impacts of this project, in combination with the seven other planned and ongoing highway improvement projects along the Interstate 5 and SR 126 corridors are not analyzed. We are concerned that cumulatively, impacts to air quality, water quality (stormwater), loss of wildlife habitat and impacts to the County's designated Significant Ecological Areas (SEA)s, from all the proposed roadway improvements that are currently planned or underway within the Santa Clarita region, might be substantial. In EPA's opinion, there is not enough information and analyses presented with respect to indirect and cumulative impacts to support a Finding of No Significant Impacts (FONSI) for the construction of this proposed interchange improvement project.

EPA acknowledges that we did not submit comments on two other environmental assessments (EA)s for related projects in the Santa Clarita area, that were previously circulated to our office, namely the Interstate 5/Valencia Boulevard EA (EA 107160) dated April 10, 2000, and the Interstate 5/Magic Mountain Parkway Interchange EA (EA 187000) dated May 9, 2000. In as

### **Comment 9A**

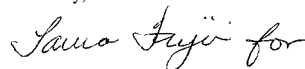
Section 2 of the IS/EA demonstrates that the proposed improvements from this project would accommodate the forecasted area build-out and resultant increases in traffic volumes on State Route (SR)-126. This project, and specifically the Preferred Alternative, would improve the Level of Service (LOS) at the freeway ramp intersections with the roads leading to and from this interchange from LOS F under the no-build condition to LOS C with the proposed improvements. The Preferred Alternative further reduces delay and improves safety by (1) eliminating the westbound SR-126 left turn for access to the Interstate 5 (I-5) southbound lanes, and (2) increasing connector capacity and reducing weaving conflicts for eastbound SR-126 traffic to the southbound I-5 lanes.

as much as our new review staff members are being tasked to focus on enabling better environmental review of transportation projects, we offer our comments on the pending IS/EA for the I-5/SR-126 interchange modifications and hope that it leads to a more comprehensive approach to environmental review and ultimately, fewer environmental impacts from roadways in the region.

Our specific concerns and suggestions are presented in detail in the attached document. The central message we wish to convey is that the NEPA process is not properly served by performing individual environmental impact assessments interchange by interchange, roadway segment by segment, even though that may be the way the funding is appropriated. The scope of analysis must include related actions and analyze their impacts accordingly. For instance, 40 CFR §1502.4 clearly states “(p)roposals or parts of proposals which are related to each other closely enough to be, in effect, a single course of action shall be evaluated in a single impact statement.” We believe that cumulative impacts caused by all of these connected actions that modify the roadway system should not be analyzed action by action where individual environmental impacts appear minor and inconsequential, but as a whole, for the system of affected roads.

Thank you for giving us the opportunity to review the EA for the Interstate-5/State Route 126 interchange improvement project. To improve coordination with our agency, and for answers to any questions you may have, please contact Liz Varnhagen of my staff at (415) 744-1624 or me at (415) 744-1574. We look forward to hearing from and working with you.

Sincerely,



David Farrel, Manager  
Office of Federal Activities

cc: FHWA, Sacramento  
Steven John, EPA, Los Angeles  
Aaron Allen, Corps of Engineers, Los Angeles  
Bruce Henderson, Corps of Engineers, Ventura

### **Comment 9B** **Purpose and Need**

The purpose and need statement clearly documents the fact that the I-5/SR-126 Interchange, the primary interstate truck route connecting Ventura County with Central California and the Los Angeles Basin, is severely deficient in terms of its outdated design with missing ramp connections and its inadequate capacity for handling projected east-west traffic volumes on the SR-126 bridge over I-5 and at the ramp intersections. As shown in Table 2 in Section 1.2.2, without the proposed interchange improvements, both the northbound and southbound ramp intersections will have a breakdown in traffic flow, or LOS F, during the a.m. and p.m. peak periods with the increase in forecasted traffic volumes.

The planned improvements would also increase safety for the traveling public by reducing existing accident rates, which are above statewide average accident rates for a similar type facility. Without the planned improvements, these accident rates can be expected to increase due to the projected local and inter-regional traffic growth that is forecasted at this location.

### **Range of Alternatives**

The IS/EA evaluate a reasonable range of alternatives, including two build alternatives and a no-build alternative. The two build alternatives, Alternative A and Alternative C, are shown to meet the project purpose and need while having minimal impact on the natural and social environment. The IS/EA shows that the high-priority improvements needed at I-5/SR-126, although related to other area freeway projects in terms of the zonal traffic circulation and growth analysis, address an independent, system-level connectivity need, rather than a local arterial access need.

# NEPA

## General

EPA finds that this document does not fully comply with the National Environmental Policy Act. We do not support the purpose and need statement, the scope of analysis, the range of alternatives, what is identified as “indirect” effects of the project, nor the cumulative impact analysis. We feel that it is inappropriate to perform an environmental impact analysis on one freeway interchange improvement project when there are a host of similar actions being planned within the immediate vicinity, all in response to the same underlying project need. While we recognize that the individual projects are funded in this segmented fashion, we do not believe that the full magnitude of the cumulative environmental impacts may be adequately addressed in this disjunct manner.

In reviewing the subject document, as well as the related EAs, it appears that Caltrans and FHWA are in the process of performing environmental impact analyses for seven individual project segments along the Interstate 5 and SR 126 corridor that are all partially funded by Valencia Company, the region’s largest landowner and developer. These segments include:

- The Commerce Center Drive/SR-126 intersection will become a grade-separated freeway interchange with on-and off-ramps. This intersection, approximately 1 mile west of the I-5/SR-126 interchange, was originally considered a part of this project.
- Newhall Ranch Road will become an ultimate six- to eight-lane arterial, connecting to McBean Parkway. This road feeds the I-5/SR-126 interchange, and will provide better access to the Newhall Ranch Development.
- Planned improvements to the I-5/Hasley Canyon Road interchange, about a mile north of the I-5/SR-126 interchange to allow it to accommodate more traffic volume as the Valencia Commerce Center grows.
- Improving the I-5/Magic Mountain Parkway interchange and widening and realigning east bound Magic Mountain Parkway to Fairway’s Entrance, and then to McBean Parkway. This entire stretch of parkway is actually SR-126 east of I-5.
- Replacing (reconstructing) the I-5 bridge over the Santa Clara River, which includes the short stretch between the I-5/SR-126 and I-5/Magic Mountain Parkway interchanges. This stretch of I-5 is also part of SR-126.
- Realigning and widening from two to four lanes, The Old Road which runs parallel to I-5 in this corridor. This also includes replacing its bridge across the Santa Clara River. Both of these bridges traverse a stretch of the river that is classified as a Significant Ecological Area (SEA) by the County of Los Angeles, is proposed critical habitat for the Federally endangered unarmored three-spined stickleback and habitat for the endangered least Bell’s vireo, and contains multiple buried utility line crossings.
- Interchange improvements to the I-5/Valencia Blvd interchange the next one south from Magic Mountain Parkway.

These smaller scope EAs serve only to list other related planned or ongoing projects in the area; they do not **analyze** potential cumulative environmental impacts that come from

Thus, it can be seen that the other area freeway and arterial projects referred to are not similar actions, but that their purpose and need are quite different from the I-5/SR-126 project. Furthermore, several of these other projects are either nearing construction or are already under construction.

Other alternatives were considered, including an interchange at the SR-126/Commerce Center Drive Intersection, but they were eliminated because they did not address the specific purpose and need for the I-5/SR-126 interchange, namely:

- Adding the missing ramp connections to meet Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) standards
- Adding needed traffic lanes to the SR-126 bridge over I-5
- Accommodating the easterly extension of Newhall Ranch Road to McBean Parkway, pursuant to the amended City of Santa Clarita General Plan Circulation Element

Additional discussion of the reasonably foreseeable cumulative impacts of this project, in combination with other freeway and arterial projects in the vicinity, has been added to Section 5.15 of the IS/EA.

## Comment 9C

Section 5.15 of the IS/EA has been revised to include cumulative impacts analysis. It found that development of the proposed project might contribute to cumulative impacts for the following environmental resource areas: siltation, water quality, agriculture, and transportation and circulation. The project would not contribute to cumulative impacts for other environmental resource areas, including air quality, biological resources, or growth inducement. Despite the project’s contribution to cumulative impacts for the area, the contribution of the I-5/SR-126 Interchange Project to regional cumulative impacts is not expected to be substantial. As a result, there would be no substantial cumulative impacts, and no mitigation measures would be necessary.

D upgrading the complete roadway infrastructure. Without a broad based assessment of cumulative impacts, the NEPA process is not served. The incremental impacts from each separate roadway improvement project could, when viewed cumulatively, be potentially significant. Alternative ways of avoiding or alleviating these cumulative impacts cannot be thoroughly explored without taking a comprehensive approach to the solution, which might mean expanding the scope of alternatives to include rail and other forms of mass transit, bicycle corridors, or proactively designed HOV lanes. Ideally these alternatives have already been explored in the City of Santa Clarita Circulation Element Amendment Final Environmental Impact Report dated October 1997 (which we have not seen). This document is referenced in the EA for the I-5/SR-126 interchange, but as with other referenced documents, the relevant contents of this document are not presented in the EA to justify conclusions to be drawn in pursuit of NEPA compliance. As it states in 40 CFR §1502.21, agencies may incorporate material into an EIS (or EA) by reference if it serves to cut down on bulk without impeding public review, but the material shall be cited and summarized in the impact analysis.

E EPA strongly recommends that the environmental impact analysis of all these individual actions be analyzed and addressed in one comprehensive evaluation, either an EA if impacts, including cumulative impacts, are not considered significant, or an EIS. It appears that the overall purpose of all of these projects is to improve and accommodate ever increasing traffic circulation between the expanding commercial, industrial and residential developments straddling the Interstate 5 corridor between the Hasley Cannon interchange, and the McBean Parkway Interchange. Just because the need for these individual improvements has all been worked out in other master planning documents for development and transportation in the region does not mean NEPA may be applied at the time the funding is in place and the final approvals are being sought.

Purpose and Need for the Project, Scoping and the Alternatives

NEPA indicates that “The statement [of Purpose and need] shall briefly specify the underlying purpose and need to which the agency is responding in proposing the alternatives including the proposed action. (40 CFR §1502.13). With regard to scope of analysis, NEPA defines projects that might be related or interconnected as either connected actions, cumulative actions, or similar actions and advises the following:

“Connected Actions - which means that they are closely related and therefore should be discussed in the same impact statement. Actions are connected if they (i) automatically trigger other actions which may require environmental impact statements, (ii) cannot or will not proceed unless other actions are taken previously or simultaneously; (iii) are interdependent parts of a larger action and depend on the larger action for their justification.

“Cumulative actions, which when viewed with other proposed actions, have cumulatively significant impacts and should therefore be discussed in the same impact statement.

“Similar actions, which when viewed with other reasonably foreseeable or proposed agency actions, have similarities that provide a basis for evaluating their environmental consequences

**Comment 9D**

Modal alternatives to the proposed project would not address the purpose and need of accommodating the high forecasted volume of local and interstate trucks that depend on this interchange of regional significance connecting to a state highway. Commuter rail (Metrolink), bicycle, and high-occupancy vehicle (HOV) facilities are all components of state, county, and city transportation plans being implemented in the Santa Clarita Valley. The proposed project has been a critical component of the Caltrans route concept and state transportation improvement plans since the early 1980s. The Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority’s (LACMTA’s) regional HOV system plans also include I-5 in this subregion.

**Comment 9E**

See response to Comment 9B.

together, such as common timing or geography. An agency may wish to analyze these actions in the same impact statement. It should do so when the best way to assess adequately the combined impacts of similar actions or reasonable alternatives to such actions is to treat them in a single environmental impact statement.” (40 CFR §1508.25).

The rules of scoping and identification and analysis of project alternatives apply to EAs as well as EISs. If the true underlying need for the regional transportation improvements is identified in a focused statement of purpose, then various appropriate alternative projects may be identified and analyzed to meet the stated purpose, and environmental impacts may thus be avoided or minimized where feasible. Evaluating various interchange designs in isolation of other connected roadway improvements or conditions does not satisfy NEPA’s requirements, nor does it lead to well planned transportation corridors that attempt to minimize adverse impacts to the environment.

#### Cumulative and Indirect impacts

Under NEPA a *cumulative* impact is “...the impact on the environment which results from the incremental impact of the action when added to other past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions regardless of what agency (Federal or non-Federal) or person undertakes such other actions. Cumulative impacts can result from individually minor but collectively significant actions taking place over a period of time.” (40 CFR §1508.7). For clarification, *indirect* effects “... are caused by the action and are later in time or farther removed in distance, but are still reasonably foreseeable. Indirect effects may include growth inducing effects and other effects related to induced changes in the pattern of land use, population density or growth rate, and related effects on air and water and other natural systems, including ecosystems.” (40 CFR §1505.8). In this context, indirect impacts are the collective impacts of the non-federally funded roads that tie into the FHWA approved projects, as well as potential development that could not occur successfully without the enhanced roadway infrastructure.

EPA notes that to our knowledge, Valencia Company is integrally involved with the planning and funding of all the highway improvement projects that are listed above. The EA for the I-5/SR-126 interchange improvements discusses the planned and ongoing expansion of the Valencia Commerce Center to the west of Interstate 5 and adjacent to SR-126, is forecast to grow from the existing 49 acres to 296 acres by the year 2020, resulting in large employment center north of SR 126 at Commerce Center Drive. Additionally, this growth will necessitate other transportation improvement projects such widening the Hasley Canyon interchange at I-5, and the Commerce Center Drive interchange at SR-126, and ultimately the construction of a new bridge across the Santa Clara River at Commerce Center Drive. It appears that all these projects are interrelated.

The comprehensive environmental impact analysis under NEPA that addresses much of this projected regional growth that exists today is the EIS prepared by the US Army Corps of Engineers, Los Angeles District, both the draft EIS dated December 1997, and the final EIS dated August 1998. That document lead to a long term Department of the Army permit under Section 404 of the Clean Water Act, to Valencia Company, authorizing proposed impacts to the Santa

#### **Comment 9F**

See response to Comment 9B.

#### **Comment 9G**

See discussion under “Range of Alternatives” for Comment 9B.

#### **Comment 9H**

See response to Comment 9C.

#### **Comment 9I**

The IS/EA indicates that the proposed project is identified in the 2000/2001 – 2005/2006 Regional Transportation Improvement Program

Clara River and its tributaries, between the Los Angeles Aqueduct crossing in the east, and Commerce Center Drive to the west. We note that the Corps EIS did not consider or address impacts from potential Caltrans projects such as the replacement of the I-5 bridge over the Santa Clara River. Further, as in EPA's comments on the FEIS, the Corps's document did not assess environmental impacts to upland areas from upland development projects that could be considered induced by the construction of the proposed roads (and bridges) that the Corps would authorize. Their EIS references several locally approved environmental impact reports that have supposedly addressed environmental impacts to upland areas, but includes no details, largely because the focus of the Corps EIS was restricted to impacts to waters of the U.S.

The potential environmental impacts that EPA believes could be significant if evaluated on a cumulative basis are principally impacts to air quality from the roadway construction as well as the regional growth it induces, and potential adverse impacts to stormwater runoff that will pass through more and more urbanized area (and roadways) before being discharged into water of the U.S. Additionally upland wildlife habitat and farmland will be lost as the roadways facilitate growth; the analysis of these losses should be disclosed collectively. While mitigation of these impacts may not be the responsibility of the transportation agencies, the evaluation of impacts and public disclosure can help facilitate informed decision making for progressive planning that can hopefully alleviate foreseeable resource conflicts.

#### Air Quality

The analysis of air quality and water quality in the EA for the I-5/SR-126 interchange modifications may be adequate for the interchange as an isolated project, but is not meaningful in the context of the other seven highway improvement projects identified above, in light of the area's non-attainment for ozone and PM<sub>10</sub>. While interchange projects may be exempt from the requirement to perform a regional emission analysis, once again, given that there may be several highway improvement projects underway simultaneously, these impacts should be addressed cumulatively. The EA references two documents that assessed cumulative regional air quality impacts associated with the Valencia Commerce Center and Newhall Ranch Road. The analyses and conclusions of these documents should be presented in this EA for the reader who might not have ready access to those documents, and to better justify the conclusion of no cumulative impact for this project (40 CFR §1502.21).

In closing, we question whether having seven separate EA's for many ongoing highway improvement projects occurring within an interconnected geographic area over the course of the next three to four years is an appropriate analysis within the spirit and intent of NEPA. We believe, at a minimum, it is inappropriate to split off, the EA for the Commerce Center/SR-126 interchange, the reconstruction of the bridge over the Santa Clara River (which is part of SR 126, as well as Interstate 5), and the I-5/ Magic Mountain Parkway interchange improvements. However, until the project purpose and need are clearly defined, the limits to the scope of analysis can not be determined, and possibly all of the listed highway improvements should be included.

(RTIP), which was approved by the United States (U.S). Department of Transportation (DOT) (FHWA/Federal Transit Administration) on October 6, 2000. The Clean Air Act Amendments (CAAs) of 1990 require that transportation plans, programs, and projects that are funded by or approved under Title 23 United States Code (U.S.C.) or Federal Transit Act (FTA) conform to the state or federal air quality plans (e.g., RTIP). Therefore, by design, inclusion of this project in the most recent RTIP indicates that the potential cumulative regional impacts have been addressed and are acceptable.

On the local scale (i.e., for carbon monoxide [CO] and respirable particulate matter [PM<sub>10</sub>] hotspot analyses), the potential impacts have been analyzed using traffic projections derived from the Santa Clarita Valley Consolidated Traffic Model, which uses future land use and travel patterns that account for the cumulative projected growth of the project area. Because the traffic volumes used were cumulative for the local analysis, arguably the potential for cumulative impacts has been taken into account due to this and other projects that are planned or presently underway.

#### **Comment 9I**

As discussed under response to Comment 9B, other alternatives were considered as part of the I-5/SR-126 improvements, including an interchange at the SR-126/Commerce Center Drive Intersection. These other alternatives were eliminated because they did not meet the specific purpose and need for the I-5/SR-126 project. None of the other project listed in Section 2.3, including reconstruction of the Santa Clara River Bridge at the I-5/ Magic Mountain Parkway interchange, are related to the I-5/SR-126 project purpose and need; however, like the SR-126/Commerce Center Drive project, they do contribute to the reasonably foreseeable cumulative impacts to area resources affected by the referenced freeway and arterial transportation projects in the area (see Section 5.15).

K The responsibility lies with FHWA to demonstrate that the *cumulative* project effects with regard to air quality impacts, water quality impacts, and habitat loss for endangered species for each individual improvement project are below levels of significance, when potential environmental impacts are combined with the potential environmental impacts of all the other 'similar', interconnected roadway improvement projects in the area. If FHWA is unable to successfully demonstrate that project impacts are less than significant or that those impacts cannot be mitigated below levels of significance, then the preparation of an EIS would be warranted.

**Comment 9K**

See response to Comment 9C.

To: chris.benz-blumberg@dot.ca.gov

Subject: I-5/SR-126 Interchange Project

ATTN: Chris D. Benz-Blumberg

Ronald Kosinski  
Environmental Planning Branch Chief  
Caltrans District 7  
120 South Spring Street  
Los Angeles, CA 90012  
(213) 897-0703

From:

Santa Clarita Valley Historical Society  
Leon Worden, Vice President  
Post Office Box 221925  
Newhall, CA 91321  
(661) 255-1234 x237 (Leon Worden)

December 29, 2000

Gentlemen:

Thank you for the opportunity for the Santa Clarita Valley Historical Society to comment on the Draft Initial Study/Environmental Assessment ("Draft Study") for the I-5/SR-126 Interchange Project ("the Project").

We have two primary areas of concern, one involving a possible prehistoric site and the other concerning possible historic artifacts.

1) Chaguayabit

As noted in the Draft Study, a major prehistoric village site exists somewhere in the vicinity of the confluence of Interstate 5 and State Route 126. Its location has not been discovered. As noted in the Draft Study, a burial site was discovered 30 years ago, about a quarter-mile southeasterly of the Project area; however, it is not believed that the village site and the burial site were in the same location.

There exists the possibility, albeit fairly remote, that the village site could be discovered during work on the Project. Additionally, there exists the possibility that portions of the village site, even if it did not occur at the Project area, may have been transported to the Project area by floodwaters in 1928.

A We are encouraged that you plan to have a qualified Archaeologist present during construction and wish to express our support for this course of action.

**Comment 10A**  
No comment required.

2) St. Francis Dam Disaster Debris

The Project area is in the general floodpath of the St. Francis Dam Disaster of March, 1928. The dam carried everything from homes and cars to bodies downriver, from Saugus to the Pacific Ocean near Ventua.

There is a strong possibility that historic artifacts, carted along by the floodwaters and deposited in the Project area, may be unearthed during construction.

B We would request that an Archaeologist who can identify such items be present during construction. Also, if possible, we would request that any items (St. Francis Dam Disaster debris) recovered from the project area be turned over to the Santa Clarita Valley Historical Society for preservation and archiving.

Thank you again for your consideration,

LEON WORDEN  
Vice President, Santa Clarita Valley Historical Society

**Comment 10B**

It is the policy of the State Historical Resources Commission to encourage the expansion of existing curation repositories and to promote the creation of new repositories to meet the goal of permanent preservation of materials removed from prehistoric and historic archaeological sites by investigations conducted pursuant to environmental laws and regulations, or by investigations conducted for legitimate scientific and educational purposes. If the Santa Clarita Valley Historical Society meets the criteria for a “qualified repository” of archaeological collections, then any items uncovered identified as part of the St. Francis Dam Disaster debris may be turned over for preservation and archiving. Otherwise, alternative curation options will need to be developed.



**COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES**  
**DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC WORKS**

900 SOUTH FREMONT AVENUE  
 ALHAMBRA, CALIFORNIA 91803-1331  
 Telephone: (626) 458-5100

HARRY W. STONE, Director

ADDRESS ALL CORRESPONDENCE TO:  
 P.O. BOX 1460  
 ALHAMBRA, CALIFORNIA 91802-1460

IN REPLY PLEASE  
 REFER TO FILE WM-2

January 25, 2001

Mr. Ronald Kosinski, Chief  
 Caltrans District 7  
 Office of Environmental Planning  
 120 South Spring Street  
 Los Angeles, CA 90012

Attention Chris D. Benz-Blumberg

Dear Mr. Kosinski:

**RESPONSE TO AN INITIAL STUDY/ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT  
 INTERSTATE 5/STATE ROUTE 126 INTERCHANGE PROJECT**

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on the Initial Study/Environmental Assessment (IS/EA) for the proposed Interstate 5/state Route 126 Interchange Project. We have reviewed the (IS/EA) and offer the following comments:

Environmental Programs

A As projected in the Los Angeles County Countywide Siting Element, which was approved by a majority of the cities in Los Angeles County in late 1997, by the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors in January 1998, a shortfall in permitted daily landfill disposal capacity may be experienced in the Los Angeles County within the next few years. The construction activities associated with the proposed project will increase the generation of solid waste, and will negatively impact solid waste management infrastructure in the County. As such, the proposed environmental document must identify what measures the project proponent will implement to mitigate the impact. Mitigation measures may include, but not limited to, implementation of waste reduction and recycling programs to divert the construction waste from the landfills.

B The existing hazardous waste management (HWM) facilities in this County are inadequate to handle the hazardous waste currently being generated. The proposed project will generate hazardous waste which could adversely impact existing HWM facilities. This issue should be addressed and mitigation measures provided.

**Comment 11A**

Section 5.2 of the IS/EA has been revised to discuss the generation of construction debris by the proposed project. It states that construction of the proposed project would result in the generation of concrete and asphalt debris and rebar. However, the majority of these materials would be reused in the construction of the proposed project and would not result in a significant project impact. Food wrappers, miscellaneous trash, and septic waste from the construction contractor employees would be generated during the construction phase of the project. Chemical toilets would be used for septic waste; however, the project would generate solid waste only during the short-term construction period, so only minimal impacts would be expected. In the long term, no solid waste would be generated by any of the alternatives for the I-5/SR-126 Interchange Project. As a result, the project would result in less-than-substantial impacts to solid waste management, and no mitigation measures are necessary.

**Comment 11B**

Section 5.2 of the IS/EA discusses hazardous materials for the proposed project. It states that an Initial Site Assessment (ISA) was conducted for the proposed project and that only two recognized environmental conditions were identified at the subject parcel:

- Potential groundwater contamination from past agricultural land use at the site and leaking underground storage tanks (USTs) and a landfill at nearby properties
- Potential for residual concentration of pesticides/herbicides in soil resulting from routine applications associated with past agricultural land use at the subject parcel

Neither of these conditions would affect the County's hazardous waste management facilities or require mitigation measures. Section 5.2 further states that approximately 0.5 hectare (1.3 acres) of potentially contaminated land would be required for the Build Alternatives.

Mr. Ronald Kosinski, Chief  
January 25, 2001  
Page 2

C Should any operation within the subject project include the construction/installation, modification, or removal of underground storage tank and/or industrial control or disposal facilities, Public Works' Environmental Programs Division must be contacted for required approvals and operating permits.

D Note that all development and redevelopment projects which falls into one of the categories established by the State of California Waste Resources Control Board will be subject to Standard Urban Stormwater Mitigation Plans.

If you have any questions regarding the above comments, please contact Mr. Patrick Udeh at (626) 458-6573.

If you have any questions regarding the environmental reviewing process of this Department, please contact Mr. Craig David at the address on the first page or at (626) 458-6311.

Very truly yours,

HARRY W. STONE  
Director of Public Works



ROD H. KUBOMOTO  
Assistant Deputy Director  
Watershed Management Division

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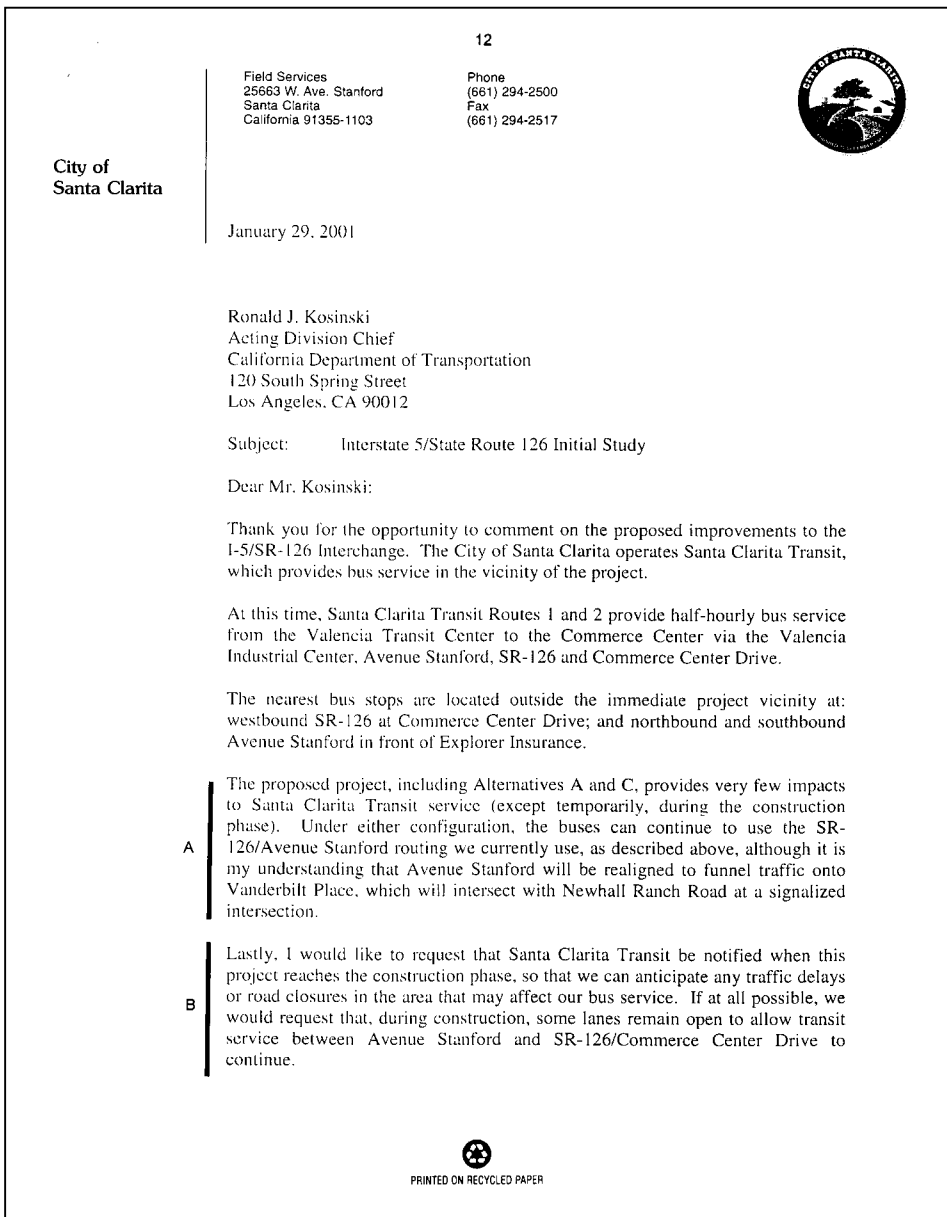
Section 5.2.1 of the IS/EA has been updated to state that recent aerially deposited lead testing determined that lead levels in the soil are not significant. As a result, any soil removed during construction would be able to be used as fill for other areas of the project and would not require landfilling or placement at a hazardous materials site. Section 5.2.2 has been updated to remove mitigation measures that refer to upcoming aerially deposited lead testing, and those discussing the classification and removal of construction waste.

#### **Comment 11C**

The proposed project would not result in the construction/installation, modification, or removal of USTs and/or industrial control or disposal facilities.

#### **Comment 11D**

All laws, guidelines, and policies of both the California Water Quality Control Board and California Integrated Waste Management Board will be adhered to.



**Comment 12A**

Section 5.10 of the IS/EA has been revised to discuss impacts to Santa Clarita Transit bus routes.

**Comment 12B**

Santa Clarita Transit will be notified well in advance of any delays and detours. Additionally, Caltrans will install signs to notify drivers of any delays or detours during construction of the proposed project.

Ronald J. Kosinski  
January 29, 2001  
Page 2

Again, thank you for the opportunity to review this proposal. Should you have any questions regarding these comments, please do not hesitate to contact me at (661) 294-2500 or at [nkvarda@santa-clarita.com](mailto:nkvarda@santa-clarita.com).

Sincerely,



Nicole Kvarda  
Transit Analyst

NK:tv  
planning15-126.DOC

cc: Anthony J. Nisich, Director of Transportation & Engineering Services



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# United States Department of the Interior

## FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

Ventura Fish and Wildlife Office  
2493 Portola Road, Suite B  
Ventura, California 93003

February 20, 2001

Ron Kosinski  
Office of Environmental Planning, District 7  
Department of Transportation  
120 South Spring Street  
Los Angeles, California 90012-3606

Subject: Draft Initial Study/Environmental Assessment for the Highway 126/ Interstate 5  
Interchange Improvement Project, Santa Clarita, Los Angeles County, California

Dear Mr. Kosinski:

We have reviewed the October 2000 draft initial study/environmental assessment (EA) for the proposed improvement project for the Highway 126 and Interstate 5 interchange. We received the draft EA on November 30, 2000. The proposed project consists of the construction of new ramps, reconstruction of existing ramps, replacement of the Highway 126/Interstate 5 separation and widening of both the Old Road undercrossing and Highway 126.

A The California Department of Transportation (CalTrans) will receive funding and approval from the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) to complete this proposed project. FHWA, as the lead federal agency for the project, has the responsibility to review its proposed activities and determine whether any threatened or endangered species may be affected. Adoption of a negative declaration for this project does not exempt the FHWA from any responsibilities under section 7 of the Endangered Species Act (Act). If the FHWA determines that a listed species or critical habitat is likely to be adversely affected, it should request, in writing through our office, formal consultation pursuant to section 7 of the Act. Informal consultation may be used to exchange information and resolve conflicts with respect to threatened or endangered species or their critical habitat prior to a written request for formal consultation. During this review process, the FHWA may engage in planning efforts but may not make any irreversible commitment of resources. Such a commitment could constitute a violation of section 7(d) of the Act.

B The draft EA states that there may be a slight increase in the amount of construction related erosion and stormwater runoff to the Santa Clara River, which could potentially degrade surface water quality (page. 5-3). Although the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) will implement best management practices to minimize and avoid adverse impacts to water quality from the proposed project, the project will still require National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System permits "as well as consultation with state and federal agencies concerning protection

### **Comment 13A**

All required consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) for Section 7 will be followed.

### **Comment 13B**

Both the Negative Declaration and Section 5.7.1 have been revised to specifically mention that no significant impacts would affect the unarmored threespine stickleback (*Gasterosteus aculeatus williamsoni*), least Bell's vireo (*Vireo bellii pusillus*), or southwestern willow flycatcher (*Empidonax traillii extimus*).

Ron Kosinski

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measures for listed aquatic species in the project vicinity” (page 5-4). In addition to the potential impacts to water quality and corresponding effects to listed aquatic species, such as the endangered unarmored threespine stickleback (*Gasterosteus aculeatus williamsoni*), the quality of riparian habitat along this portion of the river may be degraded from stormwater runoff, erosion, and release of construction-related materials. The willow-riparian vegetation in this location may be used by the endangered least Bell’s vireo (*Vireo bellii pusillus*) for nesting and by both least Bell’s vireos and the endangered southwestern willow flycatcher (*Empidonax traillii eximius*) for foraging. We recommend that you address impacts to these species in the negative declaration.

C According to the draft EA, two federally endangered plants, Nevin’s barberry (*Berberis nevinii*) and slender-horned spinyflower (*Dodecahema leptoceras*), may potentially be found in areas adjacent to the project site (page 3-9). The draft EA further states that Caltrans will not perform focused surveys for these species because they are not expected to occur within the study area (page 5-9). While habitat suitable for these species may not be located within the area of proposed construction, negative impacts to adjacent habitat and these species still may occur as a result of construction activities, including vehicle access and parking, worker foot traffic, and stormwater runoff from the work site. We recommend that Caltrans conduct focused surveys for the Nevin’s barberry and slender-horned spinyflower in and around the project site. To assist you, we are enclosing a copy of the Service’s Guidelines for Conducting and Reporting Botanical Inventories for Federally Listed, Proposed and Candidate Plants.

D Surveys were conducted for “special status wildlife species” in 1999 (EA, page 5-9). The draft EA does not indicate whether these were focused, protocol surveys. We recommend that focused surveys, following the Service’s protocols and guidelines, be conducted to ensure that the most up-to-date information is included in the EA. To assist you, we are enclosing copies of the Service’s arroyo toad (*Bufo microscaphus californicus*), least Bell’s vireo and southwestern willow flycatcher survey protocols.

If you have any questions regarding this letter, please contact Louise Lampara of my staff at (805) 644-1766.

Sincerely,

  
for Diane K. Noda  
Field Supervisor

Enclosures

### **Comment 13C**

Response to comment in progress.

### **Comment 13D**

Response to comment in progress.

**Guidelines for Conducting and Reporting Botanical Inventories for  
Federally Listed, Proposed and Candidate Plants**

(September 19, 1996)

These guidelines describe protocols for conducting botanical inventories for federally listed, proposed and candidate plants, and describe minimum standards for reporting results. The Service will use, in part, the information outlined below in determining whether the project under consideration may affect any listed, proposed, or candidate plants, and in determining the direct, indirect, and cumulative effects.

Field inventories should be conducted in a manner that will locate listed, proposed, or candidate species (target species) that may be present. The entire project area requires a botanical inventory, except developed agricultural lands. The field investigator(s) should:

1. Conduct inventories at the appropriate times of year when target species are present and identifiable. Inventories will include all potential habitats. Multiple site visits during a field season may be necessary to make observations during the appropriate phenological stage of all target species.
2. If available, use a regional or local reference population to obtain a visual image of the target species and associated habitat(s). If access to reference populations(s) is not available, investigators should study specimens from local herbaria.
3. List every species observed and compile a comprehensive list of vascular plants for the entire project site. Vascular plants need to be identified to a taxonomic level which allows rarity to be determined.
4. Report results of botanical field inventories that include:
  - a. a description of the biological setting, including plant community, topography, soils, potential habitat of target species, and an evaluation of environmental conditions, such as timing or quantity of rainfall, which may influence the performance and expression of target species
  - b. a map of project location showing scale, orientation, project boundaries, parcel size, and map quadrangle name
  - c. survey dates and survey methodology(ies)
  - d. if a reference population is available, provide a written narrative describing the target species reference population(s) used, and date(s) when observations were made

- e. a comprehensive list of all vascular plants occurring on the project site for each habitat type
- f. current and historic land uses of the habitat(s) and degree of site alteration
- g. presence of target species off-site on adjacent parcels, if known
- h. an assessment of the biological significance or ecological quality of the project site in a local and regional context

5. If target species is(are) found, report results that additionally include:

- a. a map showing federally listed, proposed and candidate species distribution as they relate to the proposed project
- b. if target species is (are) associated with wetlands, a description of the direction and integrity of flow of surface hydrology. If target species is (are) affected by adjacent off-site hydrological influences, describe these factors.
- c. the target species phenology and microhabitat, an estimate of the number of individuals of each target species per unit area; identify areas of high, medium and low density of target species over the project site, and provide acres of occupied habitat of target species. Investigators could provide color slides, photos or color copies of photos of target species or representative habitats to support information or descriptions contained in reports.
- d. the degree of impact(s), if any, of the proposed project as it relates to the potential unoccupied habitat of target habitat.

- 6. Document findings of target species by completing California Native Species Field Survey Form(s) and submit form(s) to the Natural Diversity Data Base. Documentation of determinations and/or voucher specimens may be useful in cases of taxonomic ambiguities, habitat or range extensions.
- 7. Report as an addendum to the original survey, any change in abundance and distribution of target plants in subsequent years. Project sites with inventories older than 3 years from the current date of project proposal submission will likely need additional survey. Investigators need to assess whether an additional survey(s) is (are) needed.
- 8. Adverse conditions may prevent investigator(s) from determining presence or identifying some target species in potential habitat(s) of target species. Disease, drought, predation, or herbivory may preclude the presence or identification of target species in any year. An additional botanical inventory(ies) in a subsequent year(s) may be required if adverse conditions occur in a potential habitat(s). Investigator(s) may need to discuss such conditions.

9. Guidance from California Department of Fish and Game (CDFG) regarding plant and plant community surveys can be found in Guidelines for Assessing the Effects of Proposed Developments on Rare and Endangered Plants and Plant Communities, 1984. Please contact the CDFG Regional Office for questions regarding the CDFG guidelines and for assistance in determining any applicable State regulatory requirements.



# United States Department of the Interior

## FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

Ventura Fish and Wildlife Office  
 2493 Portola Road, Suite B  
 Ventura, California 93003

May 19, 1999

### SURVEY PROTOCOL FOR THE ARROYO TOAD

The following guidelines are provided to facilitate accurate assessments of the presence or absence of the federally listed endangered arroyo toad (*Bufo microscaphus californicus*). Accurate survey data are needed to provide the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) with sufficient information to respond to requests for Federal permits and licenses. Currently, surveys performed in accordance with these guidelines will not require a permit under section 10(a)(1)(A) of the Endangered Species Act of 1973, as amended. However, permits to conduct arroyo toad surveys may be required in the future. In all cases, extreme care must be taken when conducting surveys to avoid inadvertently injuring or killing toads, or damaging their habitat. These guidelines are not meant to be used for long-term monitoring of projects or the overall status of populations; guidelines for such monitoring efforts should be developed with the assistance of the Service for specific cases.

The Service recommends that the following survey guidelines be used to determine if arroyo toads are present in the vicinity of proposed activities, but cautions that negative surveys during a year of severe weather (e.g., drought, extended rainy season, cold weather) may be inconclusive. Contact the appropriate field office (addresses and phone numbers below) for additional information before conducting surveys.

- 1) Areas within one kilometer (1 km) of arroyo toad sites (documented by the presence of eggs, larvae, juveniles, or adults) that have suitable habitat will be presumed to have arroyo toads.
- 2) If the sole purpose of surveys is to determine the presence or absence of the arroyo toad, surveys will cease immediately upon determination that arroyo toad eggs, larvae, juveniles, or adults are present in the survey area. The arroyo toad locations will be recorded on a USGS 1:24,000 (7.5 minute) map.
- 3) To be reasonably confident that arroyo toads are not present at a site, at least six (6) surveys must be conducted during the breeding season, which generally occurs from March 15 through July 1, with at least seven (7) days between surveys. Extreme weather conditions can cause variations in the breeding season; these conditions should be fully considered when developing a schedule of surveys. If uncertainty exists as to whether environmental conditions are suitable (see guideline #9 below), contact the appropriate field office for further information.

- 4) At least one survey will be conducted per month during April, May, and June.
- 5) Surveys will include both daytime and nighttime components conducted within the same 24-hour period (except when arroyo toads have been detected in the survey area).
- 6) Daytime surveys will include an assessment and mapping of: a) arroyo toad habitat suitability, and b) the presence of arroyo toad eggs, larvae, or juveniles. Extreme caution must be used to avoid crushing arroyo toads that are burrowed into sand bars and banks, or lodged in depressions in the substrate (sand, gravel, soil). Arroyo toads will use trails and roads up to several hundred meters from breeding sites while foraging; therefore, caution must be taken to not disturb, injure, or kill arroyo toads when using these roads and trails.
- 7) Daytime surveys will be conducted by walking slowly along stream margins and in adjacent riparian habitat, visually searching for (but not disturbing) eggs, larvae, and juveniles. If necessary, surveyors may walk within the stream, taking care not to disturb or create silt deposits within breeding pools. If stream crossings are necessary, these should be on the downstream ends of potential breeding pools or in fast-flowing channels to minimize the likelihood of stirring up silt deposits. Arroyo toad eggs usually are laid in shallow water (less than four inches deep), and are susceptible to being smothered by silt that may be raised by walking in or across breeding pools.
- 8) Nighttime surveys (assuming eggs, larvae, and/or juveniles have not been detected) will be conducted by walking slowly and carefully on stream banks. Surveyors should stop periodically and remain still and silent for approximately 15 minutes at appropriate sites to wait for arroyo toads to begin calling. The same cautions used for daytime surveys to avoid disturbing, injuring, or killing arroyo toads will be incorporated.
- 9) Nighttime surveys must be conducted between one hour after dusk and midnight, when air temperature at dusk is 55 degrees Fahrenheit or greater. Surveys should not be conducted during nights when a full or near-full moon is illuminating the survey area or during adverse weather conditions such as rain, high winds, or flood flows.
- 10) Nighttime surveys must be conducted as silently as possible, because talking or other human-generated noises may cause arroyo toads to stop calling or leave the creek. Strong headlights or flashlights may be used to visually locate and identify adult arroyo toads, and flash photography may be used to document sightings of solitary individuals; otherwise, lighting should be kept to a minimum.
- 11) Pairs of arroyo toads are very sensitive to disturbances, particularly waves or ripples (calling males are less easily disturbed). Therefore, surveyors must not enter the water near amplexing or courting pairs, and must immediately leave the vicinity upon their discovery.

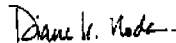
- 12) A final report, to be submitted within 30 days of each field season or positive survey, will be prepared that includes survey dates and times, names of surveyor(s), air temperature, estimated wind speed, lighting conditions, a description of the survey methods used, and survey locations plotted on a USGS 1:24,000 (7.5 minute) map.
- 13) The results of a field survey may not be valid for any of the following reasons:
  - a) surveys were conducted in a manner inconsistent with this protocol, b) surveys were incomplete, c) surveys were conducted during adverse conditions or during a season of severe weather conditions, or d) reporting requirements were not fulfilled. In such cases, the Service may request that additional surveys be conducted.

The final report should be provided to the appropriate Service field office:

For surveys in Monterey, San Luis Obispo, Santa Barbara, and Ventura Counties, Los Angeles County west of Highway 405, and the desert portions of Los Angeles and San Bernardino Counties, reports should be sent to the Ventura Fish and Wildlife Office, 2493 Portola Road, Suite B, Ventura, California 93003 (phone: (805) 644-1766).

For surveys in Los Angeles County east of Highway 405 and south of the desert, Orange, Riverside, Imperial, San Diego, and montane and cismontane San Bernardino Counties, reports should be sent to the Carlsbad Fish and Wildlife Office, 2730 Loker Avenue West, Carlsbad, California 92008 (phone: (760) 431-9440).

If a surveyor thinks that a specific project warrants alterations in this protocol, the Service should be contacted prior to the onset of surveys to discuss and possibly grant permission for proposed modifications. We would appreciate receiving any comments or ideas on these guidelines or recommendations for their improvement. For additional information, please contact the Ventura Fish and Wildlife Office at (805) 644-1766 or the Carlsbad Fish and Wildlife Office at (760) 431-9440.



Diane K. Noda  
Field Supervisor



# United States Department of the Interior

## FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

Ecological Services  
Carlsbad Fish and Wildlife Office  
2730 Loker Avenue West  
Carlsbad, California 92008



### LEAST BELL'S VIREO SURVEY GUIDELINES

JAN 19 2001

The following suggested guidelines are provided to facilitate accurate assessments of the presence/absence of the State and federally endangered least Bell's vireo (*Vireo bellii pusillus*, vireo), to provide the Fish and Wildlife Service with sufficient information to adequately respond to requests for applicable Federal permits and licenses, and to fulfill our mandate to conserve and recover the species. Currently, a recovery permit pursuant to section 10(a)(1)(A) of the Endangered Species Act is not required to conduct presence/absence surveys for the vireo, as long as this protocol is utilized and vocalization tapes are not used. These guidelines include minor modifications to our February 1992 guidelines and provide clarification of what we have been verbally recommending.

1. Under normal circumstances, all riparian areas and any other potential vireo habitats should be surveyed at least eight (8) times during the period from April 10 to July 31. However, we may concur, on a case by case basis, with a reduced effort if unusual circumstances dictate that this is a prudent course of action. For instance, intensive surveys of small, marginal or extralimital habitats by experienced personnel may well result in defensible conclusions that eight (or more) individual survey are unnecessary. Under such unusual circumstances, we will consider requests for reductions in the prescribed number of individual surveys. In any case, site visits should be conducted at least 10 days apart to maximize the detection of, for instance, late and early arrivals, females, particularly "non vocal" birds of both sexes, and nesting pairs.
2. Although the period from April 10 to July 31 encompasses the period during which most vireo nesting activity occurs, eight surveys are generally sufficient to detect most (if not all) vireo adults in occupied habitats. Precise vireo censuses and estimations of home range likely will not be possible unless surveys are conducted outside of this time window. Although focused surveys conducted in accordance with these guidelines substantially reduce the risk of an unauthorized take\* that could potentially occur as a result of land development or other projects, individual project proponents may wish to conduct surveys that are more rigorous than those that would otherwise result from strict adherence to these survey guidelines. If additional information (e.g., extent of occupied habitat, total numbers of adult and juvenile vireos in study area) is desired or necessary, surveys should be extended to August 31 and conducted in such a manner as to collect the data necessary to prepare reports that reflect the methods and standards established in the current scientific literature on this subject. In particular, information collected after July

Least Bell's Vireo Survey Guidelines

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15 will reflect a broader extent to the riparian habitat and other adjacent habitat types that the vireo typically utilizes during the latter phase of the breeding season, especially when the young become independent of the adults.

3. Surveys should be conducted by a qualified biologist familiar with the songs, whisper songs, calls, scolds, and plumage characteristics of adult and juvenile vireos. These skills are essential to maximize the probability of detecting vireos and to avoid potentially harassing the species in occupied habitats.
4. Surveys should be conducted between dawn and 11:00 a.m. Surveys should not be conducted during periods of excessive or abnormal cold, heat, wind, rain, or other inclement weather that individually or collectively may reduce the likelihood of detection.
5. Surveyors should not survey more than 3 linear kilometers or more than 50 hectares of habitat on any given survey day. Although surveyors should generally station themselves in the best possible locations to hear or see vireos, care should be taken not to disturb potential or actual vireo habitats and nests or the habitat of any sensitive or listed riparian species.
6. All vireo detections (e.g., vocalization points, areas used for foraging, etc.) should be recorded and subsequently plotted to estimate the location and extent of habitats utilized. These data should be mapped on the appropriate USGS quadrangle map.
7. Data pertaining to vireo status and distribution (e.g., numbers and locations of paired or unpaired territorial males, ages and sexes of all birds encountered) should be noted and recorded during each survey. In addition, surveyors should look for leg bands on vireo adults and juveniles if, in fact, it is possible to do so without disturbing or harassing the birds. If leg bands or other markers are observed, then surveyors should record and report the detection and associated circumstances to us by telephone, facsimile, or electronic mail as soon as possible. Reports should include the colors and relative locations of any and all bands detected, the age and sex of the marked bird, and the precise location of the detection.
8. The numbers and locations of all brown-headed cowbirds (*Molothrus ater*) detected within vireo territories should be recorded during each survey and subsequently reported to us. In addition, all detections of the State and federally endangered southwestern willow flycatcher (*Empidonax trillii extimus*, flycatcher) and State endangered yellow-billed cuckoo (*Coccyzus americanus*, cuckoo) should be recorded and reported. Any and all cuckoo and flycatcher adults, young, or nests should not be approached, and taped vocalizations of these species should not be used unless authorized in advance by scientific permits to take\* issued by us (if appropriate) and the California Department of Fish and Game. Flycatcher presence/absence surveys require a recovery permit issued by us per section 10(a)(1)(A) of the Endangered Species Act.

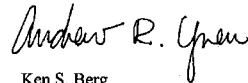
## Least Bell's Vireo Survey Guidelines

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9. To avoid the potential harassment of vireos, flycatchers, and cuckoos resulting from vireo surveys, other riparian species survey efforts, or multiple surveys within a given riparian habitat patch, detections of these three species should be reported to us as soon possible by telephone, facsimile, or electronic mail.
10. A final report (including maps) should be prepared that depicts survey dates and times and includes descriptions or accounts of the methods, locations, data and information identified in preceding sections.
11. This final report should be provided to us (at the letterhead address) and to the local office of the Department of Fish and Game within 45 calendar days following the completion of the survey effort. Additionally, a summary of all vireo survey efforts conducted during the calendar year should be submitted to each of the above offices by January 31 of the following year.

Should you have data or information to report, or have any questions regarding these survey guidelines, please contact Christine Moen ([christine\\_moen@fws.gov](mailto:christine_moen@fws.gov)), or Loren Hays ([loren\\_hays@fws.gov](mailto:loren_hays@fws.gov)) of my staff at (760) 431-9440 (facsimile 760-431-9624), or John Gustafson ([jgustafs@hq.dfg.ca.gov](mailto:jgustafs@hq.dfg.ca.gov)) with the Department of Fish and Game at (916) 654-4260 (facsimile 916-653-1019).

Sincerely,



Ken S. Berg  
Acting Field Supervisor

\* The term "take," as defined in Section 3, paragraph 18 of the Endangered Species Act of 1973 as amended (Act), means to harass, harm, pursue, hunt, shoot, wound, kill, trap, capture, or collect, or attempt to engage in any such conduct. "Take" (specifically "harass") is further defined to mean "an act or omission which creates the likelihood of injury to wildlife by annoying it to such an extent as to significantly disrupt normal behavioral patterns, which include, but are not limited to, breeding, feeding, and sheltering." "Take" (specifically "harm") is further defined as an "act which actually kills or injures wildlife. Such act may include significant habitat modification or degradation where it actually kills or injures wildlife by significantly impairing essential behavior patterns, including breeding, feeding or sheltering" (50 CFR 17.3). Please be advised that the take of the vireo and other listed species is prohibited by section 9 of the Act unless authorized by permits issued pursuant to section 7 or section 10 to the Act.

#### SOUTHWESTERN WILLOW FLYCATCHER PROTOCOL REVISION 2000

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) is revising the survey protocol for the southwestern willow flycatcher due to issues raised (Braden and McKernan 1998, 1999, Sogge et al. 1997, 1999), discussion with experts in the field, and subsequent review of pertinent documents by the Ornithological Council. The number and timing of surveys recommended in Sogge et al. (1997) (e.g., a *minimum* three surveys), are appropriate for general surveys and situations where the survey results will NOT be used to evaluate the effects of a project. However, surveyors will now need to be prepared to make at least five visits to evaluate project effects on flycatchers (e.g., typically those that would involve consultation with the USFWS). The purpose of these additional surveys is to provide greater confidence in determining resident southwestern flycatcher presence/absence and direct limited resources to where they can be most beneficial. Thus, what was once a single approach for all survey purposes has been changed to a two-strategy system; for general purposes, surveyors will need to conduct a *minimum* of three surveys, and in order to assess project-related impacts, surveyors will need to be prepared to conduct a *minimum* of five surveys.

#### ALL SURVEYS

Although the USFWS is modifying the recommended *minimum* number of survey visits to evaluate project effects to flycatchers, all surveys conducted should follow the general guidelines described in Sogge et al. (1997). This includes the use of tape-playback, thorough coverage of survey sites on ALL visits, ways to minimize impacts to the habitat, importance of recognizing all flycatcher vocalizations, importance of beginning surveys at dawn, etc.

Early-season visits in May and June (needed for both survey strategies) allow surveyors to look for flycatchers when they are most vocal. During these visits, surveyors using taped calls can elicit vocal responses from flycatchers, and subsequently observe behaviors that indicate nesting (e.g., establishing and defending territories, soliciting mates, acquiring/carrying nest material, etc.). These early visits also increase the surveyor's familiarity with the site (e.g., learning vegetation types, topography, etc.), and if birds are located, help the surveyor focus on specific areas within a site where the resident southwestern willow flycatchers might be found during the third survey period (and therefore where to devote extra survey attention).

During ALL visits, surveyors should observe and record flycatcher behavior such as territorial defense, pair status, carrying nest material, feeding fledged young, etc. Surveyors should spend additional time either during or after the survey to observe and document pair behavior and status (while being careful to not disturb the birds). Neither survey method is limited to three or five visits. Searches of large or particularly dense areas may take more than one day to complete a "single" survey of the area (depending on start time, number of surveyors, etc.). Or possibly, some surveyors may want to make extra visits to confirm an observation. It is important that all survey information be recorded on your survey forms (in Sogge et al. 1997) and submitted to your local USFWS or State wildlife agency as specified in your permit.

The survey efforts described in Sogge et al. (1997) and modified herein relate only to presence/absence type surveys. Efforts such as nest monitoring require different techniques, and more extensive effort, experience, and permitting. The permit to survey for willow flycatchers does not authorize surveyors to directly monitor or search for nests. Both State and Federal permits are required for these activities because they are more invasive and require more experience. We recognize that surveyors may discover nests while trying to detect birds. In these instances, surveyors should place themselves at a distance where birds are not disturbed, quickly determine the status of the nest with binoculars, map the location, leave the immediate area, and contact your local State or Federal wildlife agency with this information as soon as possible.

#### GENERAL SURVEYS

The *minimum* three survey effort described in Sogge et al. (1997) is appropriate for conducting general willow flycatcher surveys, but should NOT be used to help assess impacts of a specific project. When using the *minimum* three survey methodology, the flexibility exists to conduct more than three surveys in order to be more certain about the presence/absence, breeding status, home range, absence, etc. of resident southwestern willow flycatchers. This might especially be worthwhile if flycatchers are detected during periods one and two, and/or based on the confidence/experience of the surveyor. If a surveyor has more time, it may best be applied by conducting more surveys during period three.

**PROJECT-RELATED SURVEYS**

Surveyors need to plan to make at least three visits during the third (or last) survey period (June 22 to July 17), because: (a) nesting southwestern willow flycatchers can be more difficult to detect once breeding efforts are well underway (e.g., the third survey period), compared to earlier in the breeding season; (b) detections during the third period are the “verification” that flycatchers are resident, lacking other evidence of local breeding; and (c), the potentially high conservation ramifications of incorrectly determining that flycatchers are not resident at a project-related site. Detecting southwestern willow flycatchers during the last survey period can be difficult because birds are less vocal and less likely to respond (especially with singing) to playback calls. Conducting more visits during this survey period provides greater confidence in determining the presence/absence of resident southwestern willow flycatchers, and can generate more information about nesting behaviors, number of pairs, and other related information.

**MODIFIED SURVEY GUIDELINES: TIMING AND NUMBER OF VISITS**

Survey schedule

**1<sup>st</sup> survey period.**

May 15 to May 31. *Minimum* one survey.

**2nd survey period.**

June 1 to June 21. *Minimum* one survey.

**3rd survey period.**

June 22 to July 17 (this period is extended one week longer than per Sogge et al. 1997).

For general surveys - *Minimum* one survey.

For project-related surveys - Plan to conduct a *minimum* of three surveys, each at least five days apart.

**GUIDELINES FOR THE REVISED PROTOCOL FOR PROJECT-RELATED SURVEYS**

- 1) Surveyors must be familiar with and adhere to the general survey techniques and guidelines in Sogge et al. (1997). Flycatcher survey training must be completed prior to being permitted to conduct surveys. Please follow all reporting requirements described in your permits such as contacting agencies when nests are discovered or submitting survey forms at the end of the season.
- 2) For project-related surveys, visits in the third period are recommended until flycatchers are found, or until three visits are completed with no flycatcher detections. If birds are found on either the first or second survey within the last survey period (visit 3 or 4), we recommend that surveyors continue to complete all five surveys, especially if pair status could not be determined in earlier visits.
- 3) Surveys conducted in different survey periods, and multiple surveys within the third survey period, must be at least FIVE days apart from each other.
- 4) Conduct the initial survey in period three between June 22 and June 30. Because surveys must be at least five days apart and there are just 27 days in the last survey period, it is important that surveys begin as soon as possible.
- 5) Detecting flycatchers in the third survey period can confirm resident status. Additionally, behaviors observed and recorded on survey forms throughout the survey period can help determine number of pairs, nesting status, etc. Surveyors should spend time either during or after surveys to observe and document flycatcher behavior (without directly monitoring nests or disturbing bird behavior).
- 6) Flycatchers could be considered as migrants or absent if birds are not detected during the last survey period. Yet, it may be possible for early-season nests to fail by late June, and the flycatchers not be detected in the last survey period. As a result, observing and reporting behavior of flycatchers in the first two survey periods is important in determining resident southwestern willow flycatcher status.

- 7) State and Federal permits are required to search for and monitor nesting flycatchers. Contact your State or Federal wildlife agency for more information on methodology. For example, the Arizona Game and Fish Department has produced a report (Rourke et al. 1999) that specifically describes how to monitor southwestern willow flycatcher nests. The applicant is responsible for having all applicable State and Federal permits prior to conducting flycatcher survey, monitoring, and management activities.

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